

VOLUME FIFTEEN • NUMBER FOUR • WINTER 1994

# HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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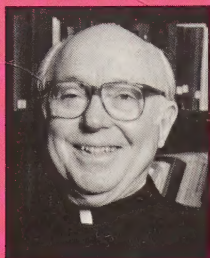
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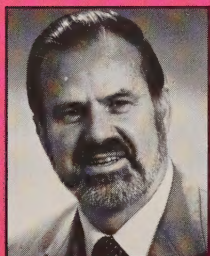




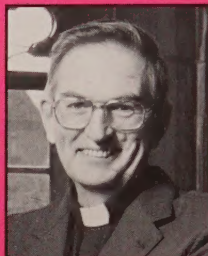
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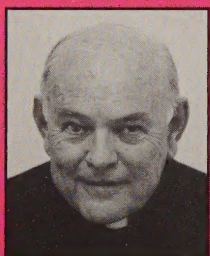
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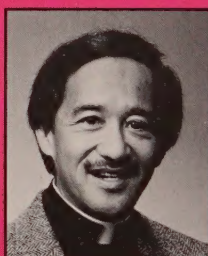
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# EDITOR'S PAGE

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## THE LOVE SONG FROM ETERNITY

**H**ere we are at the end of another year, with a multitude of events for reminiscence and a wealth of possibilities to anticipate while standing on the brink of the upcoming year. During the past several months, Israel and Jordan signed a peace agreement; Republicans swept the November U.S. elections; a show of military strength kept Saddam Hussein from invading Kuwait again; Aristide was given a second chance in Haiti; Rwanda provided a vision of Hell; passenger planes crashed and no explanation emerged; O. J. Simpson drew more public attention than all the year's top films added together; a young mother killed her two little boys for only Heaven knows what evil or pathological reason. Why is it that the terrible events seem so much more memorable than the enjoyable ones?

The start of a new year was once a time when people made resolutions. Some would decide to exercise regularly or to go on a weight-reducing diet; others would pledge themselves to stop smoking or to lower their alcohol consumption. But these days I have the impression that people are making fewer commitments like those. Too many folks have discovered that it is less emotionally painful to go on living with what's undesirable than it is to break one's resolutions and then experience the discouragement or guilt feelings that ensue. So these days, with resolutions no longer in vogue, the talk we hear around the water cooler or on the subway at year's end is about people's predictions for 1995. Your guesses may prove to be wrong, but if that happens, there is hardly a chance of your feeling as humiliated as in the past, when others reminded you of the resolutions you announced and then weren't able to fulfill.

Generally, making predictions is more fun than making resolutions. So why don't I attempt a few for the new year ahead? First, on the basis of so many years of personal experience, I'd bet my life that for most of us, 1995 will seem to fly by even more rapidly than the year just ending. Second, we will hear an increasing amount of speculation about who will be elected as our next pope. Finally, there will be an escalation of the reporting of miracles, apparitions, messages from heaven, and other supernatural phenomena, and the number of such events will keep multiplying until the year marking the millennium has finally come and gone.

Regarding this last prediction, I suppose it is inevitable that with doomsday heralds now warning us about an end-of-century catastrophe—some even promising the end of the world—we will see countless anxious and worried individuals looking for special messages from Heaven to assure them that everything is going to be all right. Such persons often search incessantly for evidence that although other people may live immorally and deserve the Lord's punishment, they themselves are approved. Among them, some believe they are called to play a Cassandra-like role, uttering dire warnings about calamities soon to occur; their voices are already being heard in more and more parts of our country and the world. Many of these visionaries claim to be receiving messages from the Virgin Mary; others see pictures or statues weeping; still others believe they are experiencing miracles in their bodies or witnessing them up in the sky. Viewing themselves as directed by God, they believe they are special persons by whom bishops ought to be guided. And when bishops form commissions to investigate the claims of such individuals and find no convincing evidence that something supernatural has been occurring, those persons loudly denounce the bishops' spiritual



incompetence. With the millennium so near, the number of such cases is likely to grow exponentially.

But aren't some of these events genuine? Isn't it possible that God is trying to use some of these people as instruments to accomplish something God urgently desires? My response would be, Who am I to say it isn't so? But what causes me to be generally skeptical is the fact that most of the people involved in these sensational happenings are obviously more interested in them than they are in the Mass, the Lord's loving presence in the Eucharist, the dwelling of the Trinity within their own souls, and the mission we have all received to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and take care of the poor. My fear is that their craving for something novel that makes them feel that they are among God's elite is going to spread contagiously to larger and larger numbers of Christians, with the result that multitudes will come to ignore the church's traditional means of sanctification and prefer searching for the spiritually spectacular.

A possible remedy? Christmas provides one; it's as close and available as the figures in the crèche. However, a new perspective is needed by those who feel that the birth of the Child, songs of angels, shepherds' adoration, and Magi's star have faded too far into past history to compete with the excitement of claims like "I saw Mary in the clouds," "Jesus spoke to me," or "On Wednesday there will be miracles at the shrine."

People who want palpable signs of God's presence and love for them at this very moment in their lives can still look at Bethlehem and find what they are seeking, if they will learn to hear what the church and its theologians have been teaching for centuries—that God lives *in eternity*, which implies that God is unchanging. All the passing periods of time on earth

occur in sequential contact with the single moment that comprises the existence of God, and in that timeless instant God thinks, loves, makes decisions, and acts in a single, never-alterable way. The love-motivated deciding by the Blessed Trinity to send the Second Person to take on flesh and blood and be born at Bethlehem, and the assigning of caroling angels and a guiding star to proclaim his arrival, are being done by God in the same eternal instant in which God comes to dwell within us when we are baptized, enlivens our souls when we receive the Eucharist, welcomes us into Heaven at the end of our lives, and gives to us the bliss of face-to-face sharing in God's own life and happiness unendingly.

In every flower and sunset, in every mountain and breeze, in every human contact or seemingly ordinary event, we witness God's constant love for us—on Christmas and all other days of the year. Everything on earth and in the sky is at every moment singing out the same thrilling tidings: God is loving us infinitely and eternally—right now.

Every second of our lives keeps us in touch with the God who, from eternity, demonstrates in the crib at Bethlehem how much we are loved. This is a mystery worth contemplating endlessly, but impossible for words to describe. If we could all open our hearts to embrace it—which is what the season of Christmas is for—who in the world would need to go looking for fresh apparitions, exotic messages, or the latest miracles in the sky?



James J. Gill, S.J., M.D.  
Editor-in-Chief

*The editors, staff, and editorial board of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT wish  
all our readers, writers, and benefactors a Christmas season  
and a New Year filled with the peace and joy, love  
and hopefulness that God alone can give.*



# Some Red Flags for Child Sexual Abuse

*Stephen J. Rossetti, Ph.D., D.Min.*

**T**here is one thing upon which laity and church officials agree: they are upset about children being sexually abused by church ministers, and they want it stopped. Parishioners and church leadership alike have been devastated by the news of the sexual abuse of children. Thousands of children's lives have been marred. The credibility of the church and its leadership has been hurt.

Both parents and church leaders ask, "Is there not some way to identify pedophilic adults *before* they abuse our children?" Church officials have earnestly sought a "silver bullet" that would take care of this problem once and for all. They have implored mental health professionals to develop a fool-proof psychological screen to weed out potential molesters.

One religious order's committee on sexual abuse suggested the use of polygraph tests and penile plethysmographies for all male candidates for their religious community. If these tests were implemented, each aspirant would be asked, while connected to a lie detector, a series of questions about his sexual orientation and past sexual behavior. Each candidate would also be given a penile plethysmography—a test that measures penile tumescence while the subject is being shown sexually provocative slides of persons of both genders and various ages. This

assessment instrument measures a biological indication of the strength of the subject's sexual attraction to female and male adults, adolescents, and children.

Currently, polygraph tests and plethysmographies are sometimes used in assessments of persons charged with sexual criminal offenses. But to use them on every person desirous of following a religious vocation would clearly be unethical from a psychological perspective, as well as pastorally imprudent and insensitive. I suspect it would be illegal as well. These tests are highly invasive of one's privacy and are arguably not justified for widespread screening purposes.

There has been a search for less invasive testing of sexual arousal to minors. Other screening tools similar to the plethysmograph, such as the Abel Screen, are becoming available. However, aside from the fact that their scientific validity has yet to be firmly established, their use for the general screening of candidates poses the same ethical problems cited above.

At present, there is no scientifically sound assessment tool that is sufficiently respectful of individuals' privacy to be used in a process of general screening for potential child sexual abusers. It is unlikely that such a tool will be available for a long time. There is no silver bullet.



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## Screening for sexual attraction to minors is difficult, even for experienced psychologists who work regularly with sex offenders

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### IMPENETRABLE DENIAL

Screening for sexual attraction to minors—for both pedophilia (attraction to prepubescent minors) and ephebophilia (attraction to postpubescent minors)—is difficult, even for experienced psychologists who work regularly with sex offenders. Most often, adults afflicted with deviant sexual interests in children are largely indistinguishable from their peers—at least on the surface. They look “normal.” They are often well-groomed and report few, if any, distressing symptoms. They are usually not excessively depressed or anxious. When given standard objective measures of pathology, such as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI-2), their profiles are largely within the normal ranges. Thus, it is little wonder that standard psychological screens previously used by church organizations did not identify candidates who would ultimately become molesters of children.

Coupled with these individuals’ normal, undistressed presentation is often a sophisticated and sometimes impenetrable denial. When asked their sexual orientation, many perpetrators say they are attracted to adult women. A few claim to be attracted to adult men. Rarely does anyone admit to being sexually aroused by children.

Men charged with child sexual abuse often enter my office accompanied by a long list of alleged offenses. Nevertheless, they insist on their innocence. I ask, “Then how do you explain the fact that several children, none of whom know each other, have come forward accusing you of sexual molestation?” The usual response is “I don’t know.” Some concoct implausible motivations or attack the credibility of the alleged victims with such statements as “These chil-

dren are unbalanced” or “They misinterpreted my actions.”

Even with written allegations in hand, the screening of potential child molesters is difficult. They look fine. They say they are fine. And objective personality measures “confirm” that they are fine. But some of them are *not* fine.

Something more needs to be done.

### INTENSIVE PSYCHOSEXUAL HISTORY

What I have found essential in clinical assessments of candidates for ministry and of adults charged with child sexual abuse is an intensive psychosexual history. Although perpetrators of child sexual abuse rarely admit to themselves or others a sexual attraction to minors, they often reveal certain patterns of psychosexual problems. By taking an in-depth history and looking for psychosexual “red flags,” a clinician can identify a significant percentage of such adults. It is important to note, however, that this is not a silver bullet. There will never be one instrument that can ferret out all those adults who might sexually molest children in the future. *This is because child sexual abuse is a behavior, not a single disorder.* There are as many different clinical profiles of child sexual abusers as there are adults who abuse children.

For example, some are fixated pedophiles. Others are ephebophiles. Some have become psychosexually stuck in childhood. Others are reenacting childhood sexual traumas that they experienced. Some are violent and might rape or kill their victims. Many more are passive and truly believe they have been seduced by a sexually “precocious” child.

Nevertheless, psychosexual interviews and tests administered to individuals who sexually molest children have revealed some commonalities. When a clinician is trying to assess the possibility that an adult is at risk for sexually molesting children in the future, or perhaps to determine the likelihood that current allegations of child sexual abuse against a person are true, the presence or absence of these psychosexual commonalities is an important clue.

### SIX WARNING SIGNS

**Confusion about sexual orientation.** By the time adults reach their mid-twenties, they should have an awareness and acceptance of their sexual orientation. Because of internal and external negative valuations of homosexuality, people who are sexually attracted to same-sex adults may take a few years longer. But the 25- or 35-year-old adult who cannot honestly admit his or her sexual orientation in the privacy of a clinical interview may be headed for trouble.



Being unaware of one's sexual orientation can occur for several reasons. Extremely naive or sheltered young adults may not know their sexual orientation. Adults suffering from longstanding major mental illnesses may never have been able to inquire about their sexuality. Likewise, young people who have been given the message that sexual feelings are wrong may not have become aware of their own sexual feelings. Some people do not become fully aware of their sexual orientation because their sexual attractions would be a source of profound shame.

People who are sexually attracted to minors are often ashamed of and disgusted by their own feelings. It is difficult enough to come to grips with a "normal" sexual orientation; to face the fact that one is sexually aroused by minors is an awful task. Psychically, it is far more convenient to repress such sexual feelings altogether.

Adults sexually attracted to minors may become confused or unclear about their sexual orientation. During the psychosexual interview, when asked about their sexual orientation, their answers may be confusing, vague, or lacking in conviction. Further probing is needed.

Some adults attracted to children will say they are heterosexual or homosexual. This may be true. Many adults who are sexually aroused by minors may also be aroused by adults. Sometimes, however, their attraction to adults is a wish, not a reality. Nevertheless, they may have convinced themselves that they are not really pedophilic or ephebophilic.

So, after asking someone's sexual orientation, the next question is crucial: "How do you know that this is your orientation?" If the declared heterosexual or homosexual orientation is only a wish, the subject will have difficulty answering that question and may resort to platitudes ("I find adults attractive") or unconvincing statements ("I know I am heterosexual").

If people claim to be heterosexual but have no sexual experience with the opposite gender, I might ask if they have ever been kissed by a person of the opposite sex. Many young people, regardless of their sexual orientation, will have kissed others in high school. If they say yes, I ask what the experience was like. One priest-perpetrator described it as a rather bland encounter and then immediately spoke of his experiencing a call to celibate priesthood.

Major clues to true sexual orientation are found in the consistent sexual objects of dreams or the sexual objects of masturbation fantasies. For example, I interviewed a man who said he fantasized about rubbing suntan lotion on a woman's body by the pool; he found it a sexually pleasurable thought. His sensual description convinced me that he was truly heterosexual.

If there is concern about a candidate's awareness and acceptance of his or her sexual orientation, the clinician should probe further. As noted earlier, confusion about sexual orientation does not necessarily signal the hidden presence of a deviant pattern of sexual arousal; it could be the result of slowed psychosexual development or a variety of sexual conflicts. Nevertheless, it clearly points out a need for future personal growth. And in my opinion, a person unaware of, or largely unaccepting of, his or her sexual orientation should not be admitted into the major seminary or into the final years of religious formation. A time away from formation for personal inquiry into sexual questions is needed. Major theology is not the time for candidates to be struggling with questions of sexual orientation.

**Childish interests and behavior.** Adults who sexually molest children often suffer from gross emotional immaturity. A mother of four who was married to a pedophile complained that she had to take care of five children. Her husband acted like a child and related to his wife as if she were his mother.

While pedophiles and ephebophiles may have the body of an adult, their psychic age is closer to that of a child. It is not surprising, therefore, that they act like children and have childish interests. Sometimes it is helpful to ask adults accused of child molestation about their hobbies or what movies they have recently enjoyed. One pedophile said he delighted in playing Santa Claus for the children. Another spoke of building train sets and taking children to amusement parks. A third mentioned the three movies he liked the most; all were children's stories. A childish person will have childish interests.

Other adults tend to perceive such individuals as childlike or naive. But real children gravitate to these immature adults, who understand children and can emotionally connect with them. An adult who has the immature psychic organization of a child can be a powerful attraction for children. It is little wonder that such adults become "pied pipers" and are considered effective with children. The truth is, they are children themselves.

It may be difficult to distinguish between the person who has a special gift for working with children and the immature adult who is sexually aroused by children. Externally, both may look the same: they have an effective way of attracting and speaking to children and are often found with children around them. A discerning question to ask is, "With whom do you spend your time off and vacations?" Pedophiles and ephebophiles are likely to spend their free time with minors. Healthy adults spend their free time with other adults. We vacation and recreate with



those around whom we feel most comfortable; we spend our free time with those who are most like ourselves. One of the largest red flags for pedophilia and ephebophilia is an adult who vacations and spends free time with other people's children.

**Lack of peer relationships.** Child molesters rarely, if ever, have satisfying relationships with other adults. As psychic children, they do not have the emotional tools to connect with their peers.

Put a pedophile in a parish, and he will eventually be spending his energy working with the children. His relationships with adults will likely be superficial and/or stereotypical. Child molesters often feel inadequate around other adults. They feel like children and do not feel competent around people their own age.

During psychological assessments to identify sexual abusers of children, I ask subjects who their closest friend is. Not uncommonly, they mention a minor. Similarly, I may ask what personal relationships have been most meaningful for them. Again, some speak of their relationships with minors.

An abuser's lack of close peer relationships may not always be easy to discern. First, if the molester is a priest, he may engage in stereotypical priest-parishioner relationships with relative ease. He may be externally friendly and pastorally caring. Because the majority of parishioners expect priests to relate to them in these stereotypical ways, most will view him as nice, if perhaps a bit distant. Few will realize that he does not have close relationships with other adults.

Also making it difficult to discern this warning sign is the fact that perpetrators often believe that their peer relations actually are close, or at least attempt to portray them as such. Many child molesters do not know what an intimate relationship is, because they have never experienced one. Probing will reveal little sharing of life and support with "friends." The following questions might be helpful: How often do you see your best friend? What do you do together? What do you talk about? How do you know when you need emotional support, and where do you go to get it? How much of yourself do you reveal to your friends? Such probing will probably reveal that the pedophile's "close" adult friends are merely acquaintances.

I believe that the strongest sign of psychological health is the existence of intimate and satisfying peer relationships. A lack of peer relationships in an adult is clearly a red flag. Some adults without peer relationships are at risk for sexually abusing children. The majority are likely to have serious psychological impairments. Such individuals are not suitable candidates for ministry.

### **Extremes in developmental sexual experiences.**

When taking a psychosexual history, the clinician should ask evaluatees directly and explicitly about their sexual experiences throughout their lives. Did you experience any childhood sex play? Was there any sexual exploration? What was puberty like? Did you date? What sexual contacts have you had with people of the same sex and with people of the opposite sex? I have found that many adults who sexually abuse children either had an excessive amount of sexual stimulation as a child or can recount almost no sexual experience whatever.

There is a common sequence of sexual experiences in the development of healthy adults. It is normal for children to have one or two experiences of "playing doctor" or looking at and touching the sexual parts of other children of approximately the same age. Puberty is likely to be an unsettling time for most children, but they manage to get through it. Masturbation is common in adolescence. Normal adolescents begin to explore their sexuality with their peers by dating and through kissing, fondling, and other kinds of sexual encounters.

Some pedophiles and ephebophiles report having experienced an unusual amount of sexual contact as a child—for example, numerous instances of childhood sex play. In early adolescence, some became involved in group masturbation circles and/or had extensive sexual contact with a cousin, a neighborhood youth, or even siblings. Some adult perpetrators masturbated compulsively as teenagers, up to several times a day. Others report a long history of mutual masturbation with their peers or extended incestuous relationships with brothers, sisters, or cousins. Some recount experiences of excessive sexual stimulation from their earliest years. It is possible that such people, sexually overstimulated as children, are psychosexually "stuck" as children. Many of them learned early in life to relate to others, especially to other children, with sex. As adults, they may continue relating to children as sexual objects.

At the other extreme are those who report a lack of any sexual contact whatever. They may never have masturbated or began masturbating late (e.g., in their twenties). They report no history of childhood sex play. Some deny having dated or engaged in sexual exploration as adolescents. When asked about their sexual fantasies, they say they have none. Sexuality was not discussed in the family; it was a taboo subject. They may even have problems identifying someone whom they currently find sexually attractive. In short, sexuality has apparently been erased from their conscious lives. Some of these individuals are simply lying. They are afraid to reveal their true experiences for fear of what will happen. Others,



however, really have had no conscious experience of their sexuality.

I believe that some people who have had little sexual experience are still basically psychologically healthy. However, I suspect that it is more often the case that they are ashamed of, frightened of, and/or repressing any sexual urges, impulses, thoughts, or fantasies. Such people try to live as if they are not sexual beings. This causes a variety of psychological symptoms. Eventually, their repressions are likely to fail, especially under stress.

I remember one pedophile who was so ashamed of his sexuality that he vowed to live "like an angel." He said he was "beyond" such things as sexual desire because of prayer and God's grace. He went on to say that he believed that a truly holy person would not have sexual struggles.

Eventually, this angel crashed. After twenty years of sexual repression, he went through a painful series of personal losses. His ministry was particularly difficult, and the normal struggles of midlife added to his overall level of stress. He became sexually active with a number of young adolescent males.

Adults who report sexual overstimulation as children or, conversely, report little sexual awareness may be at risk for sexual problems in the future. These adults may or may not be attracted to minors. In either case, however, it is unlikely that they have a balanced and healthy integration of their sexuality.

**Personal history of childhood sexual abuse and/or deviant sexual experiences.** Approximately two-thirds of the priests we have evaluated at Saint Luke Institute (Suitland, Maryland) for the sexual molestation of minors were themselves sexually molested as children.

That said, it must be emphasized that the majority of people who are sexually molested as children do *not* go on to abuse children themselves. I have heard of dioceses that will not accept candidates who admit that they have been sexually molested. This is unfortunate. Many people who experience childhood sexual molestation go on to live happy, productive lives. Nevertheless, childhood sexual abuse is a risk factor for future perpetration.

However, simply asking a subject about a history of sexual abuse may not yield the truth. Many perpetrators do not recognize instances of their own abuse. For example, one man had been fondled repeatedly by a cousin who was six years older. He said it was not sexual abuse because he found pleasure in the experience. However, upon deeper inquiry, he revealed that the encounters made him increasingly embarrassed. He felt manipulated and used. He could not

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**Some pedophiles and ephebophiles report having experienced an unusual amount of sexual contact as a child; at the other extreme are those who report a lack of any sexual contact whatever**

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extract himself from the relationship, and the contact ended only after the cousin moved away.

If the person being evaluated does not report any history of sexual abuse, I follow up with a question such as, "Did you ever experience someone older than you looking at you or touching you in a way that was sexual? If so, what happened?" Unrecognized sexual abuse is common and suggests that the abuse experienced remains unprocessed and unhealed.

But not all perpetrators were sexually molested as children. Many of them experienced other types of deviant childhood sexual experiences. Perhaps a parent was raped in front of the children. Sexual boundaries in the family may have been excessively loose (e.g., parents bathing or dressing in front of children or lounging around the house with their sexual parts exposed). A few will report having had an unusual encounter with a peer, such as prepubescent oral sex with another little boy.

In their later years, some perpetrators frequent pornographic shops and consistently use lewd magazines and videos. Others cruise for sexual partners and engage in anonymous sex. Some have a long history of brief sexual encounters. A few reveal that they sexually stimulated a young child when they were in late adolescence.

Obviously, evaluatees are hesitant to admit such deviant sexual experiences. If a general question is asked about deviant sexual experiences, the answer is likely to come back in the negative. The interviewer



is much more likely to receive a truthful answer if specific questions are posed: Have you ever had a sexual encounter with someone you did not know before that day? Have you ever used "adult" magazines or videos, or magazines or videos with pictures of children, or magazines or videos that others might consider to be pornographic? Did you ever pay someone to have sex?

The presence of deviant sexual experiences, including sexual abuse, is a significant warning sign in a psychosexual history. It is true that some candidates will simply lie about previous sexual experiences; however, many will not. Experienced clinicians can sometimes sense when an evaluatee is not being truthful.

In ministerial candidates, the presence of some types of deviant sexual experiences should be immediate grounds for rejection. For example, I cannot think of any reason to accept a candidate who sexually molested young children as an adolescent. Adults who report a significant history of anonymous sexual behavior or who report deviant sexual fantasies would also be inappropriate for ministry. Other deviant experiences should be fully explored, and the amount of subsequent healing should be considered.

Many victims of sexual abuse have made fine ministers. But the wounds incurred by the abuse should have been addressed and opened to God's healing before acceptance.

**An excessively passive, dependent, conforming personality.** While taking a psychosexual history, the interviewer will develop a sense of the subject's personality style. When this is coupled with the results of personality inventories, such as the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory, Second Edition (MCMI-II), as well as the subject's own statements about self, a coherent picture of personality should emerge. There is a common type of child molester in ministry whose personality is passive, dependent, and conforming.

A little dependency and a conforming attitude is not a bad feature for someone in ministry. Parishioners like a minister who does not come on too strong and who is eager to please. Formation programs tend to reward those who obey the rules and do not make waves. People want their ministers to be nice.

However, a significant percentage of the male ministers who sexually abuse children have a personality disorder with predominant traits including passivity, dependence, and compulsivity. This type of child molester will almost always elevate the "Dependent" and "Compulsive" scales on the MCMI-II. Such elevations should be viewed with caution because many adults who fit well in large institutions will exhibit such personality traits. But what will be striking about child

molesters is how passive and conforming they come across in the course of the psychological interview.

For example, some describe their participation in relationships in overly passive ways. They may complain of being used and manipulated by other people. Some see themselves continually in a victim stance. Most try their best to smile at others and to please. During the clinical interview, one of their major goals is to please the interviewer.

When dealing with authority, these people are overly respectful and deferential. Some become perfectionistic. It is important to them to be seen in a good light by others, especially by their superiors. They want to be good, and they want to be liked.

Unfortunately, this personality style usually hides a deep sense of personal insecurity and low self-esteem. These people often harbor a buried resentment toward others and toward authority figures. Since it is important for them to be liked, they usually bury their true feelings, wants, and desires. They do their best to bury their anger, too. They frequently describe themselves as "quiet and fearful" people.

In ministerial situations, such people often spiritually rationalize their lack of healthy assertiveness by speaking of holy obedience and doing the will of others. While Christian spirituality has proper esteem for true obedience and self-denial, these dependent-compulsive people do not find freedom in their excessive acts of self-denial. They are slaves to their own fears.

This personality style complements the aforementioned red flags of poor peer relationships and childish behavior. When such people feel inadequate with other adults, they may try to hide their inadequacies behind an agreeable and pliable exterior. Since many of them do not feel they can express their true selves, they try to be what others want them to be. Their personality disorder does not allow them to receive the human connection and warmth so necessary for a healthy life. When the breakdown of their personality organization occurs (and it usually does), it can manifest itself in a variety of ways—one of which is sexual. For those who find minors sexually available and attractive, the chance of a sexual offense is significant.

A variety of personality styles are associated with adults who sexually abuse minors, but one type seems to predominate among male perpetrators in ministry. During the psychosexual interview, the clinician should be alert to signs that the subject is excessively passive, dependent, and conforming.

## TRAINING AND EDUCATION NEEDED

Any warning sign found by itself is not necessarily an indication that the subject will be sexually inter-



ested in minors. For example, many shy, introverted people do not have good peer relations; this does not mean they are pedophiles. Many people are childlike and naive; they are not necessarily at risk for sexually abusing children.

On the other hand, if an evaluatee shows a number of the psychological warning signs described in this article, serious concern is warranted. Even if the subject does not seem to have a pedophilic or ephebophilic sexual orientation, the presence of these signals suggests the need for intensive psychotherapeutic work.

Candidates who believe that a commitment to a celibate lifestyle will help them put their sexual problems behind them are headed for trouble. How many perpetrators of child sexual abuse have told me that they thought celibate ministry would take care of their sexual struggles! Many of them had no problems for the first ten or fifteen years of ministry. Eventually, however, an unresolved sexual problem will out.

No one argues that an in-depth psychosexual evaluation is inappropriate for the clinical assessment of alleged sex offenders. A psychosexual history taken in a confidential setting by a skilled clinician is an essential part of the assessment process.

However, some have suggested that it is a violation of personal privacy to subject all candidates for priesthood and religious life to an in-depth psychosexual evaluation. I would argue that the needs of the church and the demands of ministry today necessitate this history taking, and that today's generation is well accustomed to frankness in sexual matters.

Ideally, subjects will demonstrate a healthy, integrated sense of sexuality. During the course of the psychosexual interview, they should have an awareness of and comfort with their sexual orientation. In a confidential clinical interview, they should be able to speak about their sexuality in open and honest ways.

I doubt that there will ever be a screening tool that will assuredly identify all potential child molesters. However, the mainstay of any assessment process for determining risk for sexual offense will be an intensive psychosexual interview.

The quality of the interview will directly reflect the experience and training of the clinician conducting it. Most often, well-trained and experienced clinicians attuned to risk factors for child sexual abuse will spot them in the course of the interview. Clinicians without this background might listen to the same interview and miss its significance entirely.

Perhaps what is most indicated today is not a magic screen to solve all our problems but improved education and training. Clinical personnel who assess alleged child abusers and screen candidates for ministry need to be trained in taking psychosexual histories. Clinical experts in this field need to share the fruits of their experience. Church and societal leaders need to facilitate this process.

Even with better education and training, we will not stop all child sexual abuse before it occurs. We can, however, expect to make substantial progress. Rather than waiting for the development of better screening tools, we can make much progress with the knowledge available today. Now is the time to begin.



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# Awareness of Feelings in Spiritual Discernment

*Suzanne Mayer, I.H.M., Ph.D.*

**T**he renowned philosopher René Descartes said it first: "*Cogito, ergo sum*" (I think, therefore I am). Since his initial insight, the truism has undergone numerous shadings and revisions; one of the most recent I have heard, "*Patior, ergo sum*" (I feel, therefore I am), is used by many contemporary therapists.

The implications contained in that mutation indicate a radical and often much-needed shift in our perspective on life and on moving toward health and wholeness in dealing with the various aspects of life. Feelings and our awareness of them have gained prominence in many of the therapeutic interventions undertaken by both clients and counselors.

## DOORWAY TO BREAKTHROUGHS

As a counselor working predominantly with women, many of whom have suffered confused, chaotic and crippling histories, I have seen great growth come through a movement to recognize, own, and honor feelings. I have seen life stories open up through the doorway that feelings offer. One such breakthrough is illustrated by the case of a young woman who was wrestling with repressed trauma, along with impaired relationships, poor body image, and lack of self-esteem.

After a series of interviews, she came to one counseling session with a story of a recent incident that touched on all her issues. She had been confronted by a fellow worker with an accusation that she knew was largely unfounded, coming out of the other's need to defend herself. Nevertheless, my client said, she felt "hurt because it led me to question who I really am." In looking at her anger, her need to hide and withdraw, and her overwhelming feelings of depression and violation, we became aware that this incident's tentacles reached back into some long-buried experience.

We considered terms she had used to describe her feelings: *violated, overwhelmed, plunged to the depths*. We also touched on *raw nerve*, a phrase she had spoken in many of our sessions. That term took on new meaning as she explained that her feelings of violation, anger, and being trapped escalated as those she turned to for help in her current situation—primarily persons in positions of authority at her place of employment—cautioned her "not to make waves" and to "keep it quiet" for her sake and the sake of the workplace. Suddenly, she began to cry as she recalled when and where she had heard similar warnings before. She remembered a night when she was a little child: a family member had beaten her severely, and the trusted figures to whom she had run for help and



shelter had responded by blaming her and warning her to keep the family secrets. She saw with great clarity that the anger and withdrawal she experienced were connected with many such incidents of secret-keeping throughout her life, both in the context of dysfunctional family dealings and in later confrontations with people in power positions. Feelings had opened a door that she was able to step through to move toward inner healing, and allowed her to hold on to her sense of self in the midst of hurt and confrontation.

### CAUTION IN INTERPRETATION

As much as I honor the feelings of this young woman and other clients—and the power that feelings give us to reach back, to uncover hidden past hurts and memories that still affect the present, and to begin to deal with those issues—I have also observed that at times, both my clients' and my own interpretations of feelings can be skewed. This problem surfaces chiefly during the use of feelings in decision making. Working as I frequently do with young adults who are struggling with shaping their dreams and setting goals in their lives—often in the context of seeking God's call to them in these areas—I have found that in spiritual discernment, feelings both provide insights and present obstacles.

This observation brings to mind another young woman, one very much engaged in the process of discerning her life choice. In a recent session she shared an experience of needing to leave behind both things and persons—the physical and emotional pieces that had played key roles in a very formative and valued time. As she talked, she tapped into the sense of deep loss and loneliness she felt in connection with this leave-taking. Then she reached the following conclusion, one she saw as critical to discernment: "I sometimes think, when I feel this way, that this is a sign that I might be making a mistake in the direction of my life, if such sadness, grief, and hurt are part of it. Maybe God is telling me this isn't for me, if this is what I'm feeling." I asked if her longing and loneliness were associated only with her present choices, with this particular time and direction. She answered emphatically, "Oh no, this has often been part of most of the past ten years or so. In fact, a counselor I spoke to in college suggested that I was tapping into some yawning hole from my early development." Yet the young woman now saw this hole from the past, which had yawned wide and long through college and some six years besides, as a divine message that she had made misdirected choices.

As I listen to patients like her and observe their use of feelings in decision making, I wonder what the

master of discerning—the innovator and teacher of the process of spiritual discernment, Saint Ignatius Loyola—would say about employing feelings, especially strongly negative ones, in the process. As I had suspected, his writings provide insightful guidance on this subject.

### DESOLATION INVITES CHANGE

In his *Rules for the Discernment of Spirits*, Ignatius delineates the "diverse motions prompted" in discerners and presents guidelines for distinguishing "good" motions from "bad," as well as a *modus operandi* for those who guide discerners. The "good" he calls *spiritual consolation*—a sense of God's presence, whether in joy or contrition, that allows the spirit of God to enter intimately into all the person is considering. Ignatius characterizes the "bad," termed *spiritual desolation*, with such descriptors as "gloominess," "confusion," "disgust," "distrust," and "sadness." He admonishes discerners and those working with them that periods of spiritual desolation are "no times at all to change purpose and decision." Rather, they should be invitations to "change ourselves" in the direction "contrary to the desolation."

As I reflected on Ignatius's words, I recalled how often I had heard clients make the link between feeling and purpose: "I can't do this"; "I can't go deeper"; "It hurts too much"; "I know I need to go back into counseling, but I'm afraid of what it will stir up"; "I see the need to change, to break with the past, but I'm scared"; "I know I have to confront him/her, but such scenes terrify me." The connections locked into place—but was it the right place? Ignatius seems to be saying that at the very points where feelings loom large and threatening, we need to look with the 20/20 vision of logic, analysis, and the penetrating, divine vision of truth, and to move—often in the opposite direction.

### DISCERNMENT THROUGH LOGIC

In considering such oppositional use of feelings for discernment, I was reminded of three radical discerners whose lives documented moving to God though logic and truth. Two of these were very real and recent strugglers who, in moments of critical decision making, looked at life with wide-open and searing eyes. The third emerges from the pages of Old Testament prophecy. Each offers a piece in the paradigm of 20/20 vision for contemporary clients and counselors engaged in spiritual discernment.

The two contemporary figures, C. S. Lewis and Dorothy Day, are currently acclaimed as twentieth-century mystics and, by many, as saints who speak to



our age. While they lived, however, their lives were marked with agnosticism, at times avowed atheism, and deliberate and determined avoidance of God and God's call. For them, conversion, change, and final capitulation came not through comfort and consolation but through hard wrestling against feelings to arrive at logic and truth. Their response was pulled out of the very stuff of their lives—the *klesis*, as Saint Paul calls it in his passage on discernment in Ephesians 4. For Lewis and Day, the “gifts already given”—which, as Paul indicates, come from the Lord, to be used in making life choices—were the strengths of their clear-sighted analysis and penetrating insights. But these gifts came easily for neither.

In their moving autobiographical accounts, both Lewis and Day tell of the agony and anguish that their movement away from feelings and emotional supports involved. In *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis tells of nights spent in his Oxford room—where, resistant and wracked with impulses against the call to God and Catholicism, he was driven to his knees to pray for the freedom to allow God to be God and to move him in the direction he needed to go. At last, battered into belief, he succumbed not to heart but to head, becoming the “most dejected and reluctant convert in all of England.” His experience of the rightness of his decision came not with a lift of the heart, not with a charge of the joy mentioned in the book's title, but with willed determination, careful analysis, and grueling but clear-sighted fiat. Given his feelings alone, Lewis might have remained unconverted, unconvinced, unchanged. For him, however, feelings were not the issue; God and God's call were.

His partner in reluctance was Dorothy Day, the social visionary and founder of the Catholic Worker movement. Day honestly admitted that in her sometimes tortured and tortuous route to Catholicism, her deep and transforming love of her common-law husband, her camaraderie with her coworkers in the Socialist movement, her spirit of anarchy, and her need to challenge the status quo all acted as strong magnets pulling her away from God and decision. In *Dorothy Day: Meditations*, editor Stanley Vishnewski includes Day's reflection on the momentous day of her baptism, in which she describes her feelings in terms reminiscent of Ignatian desolation:

I had no sense of peace, no joy, no conviction even that what I was doing was right. It was just something that I had to do, a task to be gotten through. . . . I was a Catholic at last, though at that moment I never felt less the joy and peace and consolation which I know from my own later experiences religion can bring.

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**As theological tradition emphasizes, vocation choices reach to fill the “God-shaped blanks” that only the divine can carve and only the divine can accommodate**

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Only after the elapse of a full year, with her reception of confirmation, did Day begin to know a consoling sense of rightness and joy—one never to be replaced with the previous state of uncertainty and alienation.

#### **MOSES AND THE BURNING BUSH**

In the third chapter of the book of Exodus (vv. 1–14), we see that these two twentieth-century discerners have a common ancestor in Moses, who hears God's call reverberating from the burning bush. Out of the *klesis*, the very ordinary stuff of a life exiled into routine, God speaks. If we attend to several predominant features of this Old Testament story, further pieces of the paradigm emerge to aid in counseling discernment.

It is true that God intervened directly in Moses' case, in the form of the “bush burning yet not consumed” (Exod. 3:2). But God had prepared Moses for the moment of theophany through the many days that preceded it—days marked by routine, uncertainty, and loneliness. Through the exile to Midian, the workaday tasks of shepherd and indentured servant, and the alienation of being a “stranger in a foreign land” (2:21), Moses had been led to the periphery of the meeting spot. As theological tradition emphasizes, vocation choices reach to fill the “God-shaped blanks” that only the divine can carve and only the divine can accommodate. For a blank to exist, a hollowing needs to happen. I am reminded of the young woman who questioned her vocation because of her experience of “yawning holes.” Dorothy Day, C. S. Lewis, and Moses seem to testify that such holes provide the first impulse to look, and often that impulse is to look in a different direction.



## TRANSFORMING VISION

But in order to gaze on emptiness and see potential, a certain transforming vision needs to develop—the clear-sighted analysis of Lewis on his knees, of Day facing the barren horizons that marked her “long loneliness.” This too Moses prefigured in his encounter on Horeb. Before Moses could enter God’s presence and stand on the sacred ground of vocation, God cautioned him to “remove his sandals from his feet” (3:5). Besides an acknowledgment of approaching the divine, can this not also be construed as a challenge to leave behind the emotional baggage of the past, to let history be just that, so that one might enter unencumbered into covenantal relationship? Perhaps the Lord’s challenge is to turn away from and move toward.

## IGNATIUS INSIGHTS ON DISCERNMENT

In the persons of our three model discerners and in the Ignatian directives, I see a strong parallel with cognitive-behavioral methods of framing and refocusing to deal with negative feelings, emotional baggage, and holes that can hinder and handicap spiritual discernment. Ignatius outlines a three-step approach in his discernment process, incorporating practical suggestions on managing the steps. Each can tie well into the “ABC” approach of those working with cognitive-behavioral techniques in dealing with distortions.

As with Lewis, Day and Moses, the initial Ignatian movement is into the presence and power of God, letting go of the need to control, allowing God to be God. Offering a religious interpretation of the cognitive-behavioral model in *Psychotherapy in a Religious Framework*, L. Rebecca Propst identifies the essential elements of “being summoned by God”:

Knowledge is insight, not factual or philosophical. We gain some insight into our freedom, our responsibility to act. We may not merely listen to the word, we are to do what it says. After we have looked at ourselves in the mirror upon being confronted by God, we become responsible beings. We cannot merely go away and immediately forget what we look like.

The next step in the Ignatian process, which goes by the name of “assessment of the data,” provides the opportunity to turn clear-sighted vision on the confusion of a situation, issue, or event. Essentially, Ignatius says to identify the available data as positives and negatives, listing the pros and cons as they emerge. The positives are those “blessed by God,” fostering growth. The negatives are those that bring distortion and dysfunctionality.

Knowing the subjective pull possible in such sorting, the wise guide, Ignatius, offers several therapeutic suggestions for maintaining a balanced perspective. One concerns the use of a codiscerner, an objective listener who can enter into the process as a provider of balance and reason. Another suggestion draws on an imaginative reflector, calling the discernor to weigh his or her present evaluations against the test of time by asking, How will this seem five years down the road? Ten years? At the point of my death? One insightful client applied this strategy by asking, “How would all this look if Peter Jennings reported it on ‘World News Tonight’?”

This data-assessment step is very much like the work in which cognitive behaviorists engage their clients to help them identify and then untwist distortions that provoke certain feelings and behaviors. The challenge is issued to the client to look at what underlies the feelings—holes, blocks, past history, present assumptions? The client then examines the patterns of distortions, seeking to counter them with real and realistic alternatives. The lonely young woman discernor described earlier was very much caught up in what is called emotional reasoning. In this distortion, a person argues experience from feeling: “I feel sad, lonely; I have suffered loss; therefore, this life choice must be a mistake.” A realistic challenge would invite her to turn that around, to question: What underlying belief is triggering this sadness? How true is that belief? How else might I interpret my sadness? How can I gain control over it, rather than letting it control me? A strong measure of control comes with an intervention like reattribution, in which a person is encouraged to reflect on other times, places, and persons associated with the same feeling. Were these too indications that his or her life choice is a mistake?

The young woman’s distortion also involves perfectionistic thinking (“If this life path can’t be happy, problem-free, and sorrow-free, then it can’t be for me”). Propst notes that those most caught in the trap of distortions are most blinded to the reality that “life has a dark side and the emotionally healthy person is only too aware of this darkness.” It is the depressed, confused, and conflicted client who seeks immediate and often permanent relief. The realistic discernor comes to realize that what God promises is not freedom from pain and loss, but the guarantee of God’s salvation through such pain—the message of the cross.

The final step of the Ignatian process is reached when the person comes to the point of making the choice and seeking confirmation of it in lived reality. For Ignatius, as for Moses, assurance came with the direct impact of a vision, but most discerners have an



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**The realistic discerner comes to realize that what God promises is not freedom from pain and loss, but the guarantee of God's salvation through such pain—the message of the cross**

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experience much closer to that of Day and Lewis as they sort their choices out of the *klesis*—the daily constraints and measures of their lives. As social creatures, we find that this often means placing our choices in the context of human community and asking, How does this affect not just me but also those with whom I live, work, play, pray, and minister? Rightness is the signal that the decision comes from and will lead back to God, but rightness does not equal creature comfort or certitude. Often the decision may have some unpleasant features or demand some challenging action: the need to confront oneself or another, to uproot oneself, to change, to move. None of these sounds very comforting, but they all can be right.

In his farewell address, with his most decisive night staring him in the eyes, the Lord promised those who called themselves his disciples a “peace the world cannot give” (John 14:27). To the world, peace often means comfort, security, and feeling good. But the final test for the discerner, as it is for anyone engaged in cognitive-behavioral processing, is whether he or she can live, and live better, with the outcome. Does the discerner’s choice make him or her more free, more in control, more healthy, more holy?

Feelings, as well as the acts of reflecting on them and interpreting them, can provide a powerful entrée into dark history and shed a great deal of light on hidden hurts and fears. But in the process of discernment, we might often be invited to move against the pull of feeling, to search for the logic, the rationale, the insight that can untwist the distortion and lead to the “20/20 vision” of right thinking. For Day, Lewis, and Moses, such was the invitation. Like them, modern spiritual discerners can reach the hard-won but very solid ground where, in the words of Thomas Hart, “desire and destiny meet, and our deepest want and God’s purpose” become one.



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# Celibacy Demands Grieving

*Gerald D. Coleman, S.S.*

**T**he March 1994 edition of *Overview*—a survey of issues affecting Catholics, published by the Thomas More Association—looks at concerns facing “an increasingly embattled priesthood,” particularly in the area of sexuality.

This survey cites Father Andrew Greeley, who told *Newsweek* (16 August 1993) that “it is intellectually dishonest to blame celibacy for the problems of the church or the priesthood.” Greeley claims that studies clearly demonstrate that priests are as mature and capable of interpersonal intimacy as are married men of similar age and education.

Priest-psychologist Thomas Nestor of Boston, in a study of Chicago priests, found that they were more likely to be satisfied with their work, their careers, and their lives than a comparable sample of laymen. Greeley contends that “priests may be the happiest men in America (or perhaps only the least unhappy). . . . The notion that celibacy is any more difficult in America today than it was forty years ago. . . is hilarious. It’s always been difficult and never impossible, not if a man is happy in his work.”

Statistical data demonstrate that men recently entering the seminary do so for one or more of three reasons: they were encouraged toward the priesthood by a parent, especially a mother; they were encouraged and invited by a priest; they had a good experience on a retreat about the priesthood.

After his journey to Denver for World Youth Day in August 1993, Pope John Paul II declared, “The young people tell us that there is hope.” During a visit to Rome’s major seminary the following February, he added that “seminarians too are signs of hope.”

What can be done to sustain this hope among those who view, and in some cases experience, the priesthood as “increasingly embattled”? What steps can be taken to make celibacy less difficult?

## **ACKNOWLEDGING SEXUALITY ESSENTIAL**

It seems imperative that we present celibacy in a clear and reasoned manner. *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* (1993) describes celibacy as “the renunciation of marriage in order to live in continence for the implicit or explicit purpose of achieving perfect charity.” The *Dictionary* indicates the importance of acknowledging the full sexuality of all human beings and asserts that although celibates are no less sexual than other people, they do renounce the genital aspect of human existence “for the sake of the Kingdom” (Matt. 19:10–12).

The notion/reality of renunciation is a critical factor in celibacy and needs careful and positive explanation.

Renunciation requires one to let go *and* to realize what one is leaving. If a celibate does not acknowledge



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## Healthy resolution of the loss of any possibility of marriage, sexual intimacy, children, or family life requires the celibate to grieve and mourn

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what he or she is leaving, then he or she will never truly appreciate or understand the loss and thus know what to grieve. Grieving is healing. In a particular way, people pray as they grieve because it is a way to surrender.

What exactly is the loss? *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* points out that the goal of celibacy is the achieving of charity. Such a charity must rest on the type of "spiritual happiness" described by Dorothy Day in *The Long Loneliness*. She wrote, "All my life I have been haunted by God. . . . I do not remember that I was articulate or reasoned about this love, but it warmed and filled my heart." Early in her life she heard the "name of God," and that gift later enabled her to answer the call to a celibate vocation in order to fulfill the gospel message in her life. Day experienced the need to choose between "God or man" (her common-law husband), and her celibate choice came not out of denying or giving up her need for intimacy but out of needing something more in her life. She found that something with "the people"—with community.

Day experienced a call of God that authenticated profound surrenders and losses in her life. Celibacy, then, is a recognition of sacrifice—not because individual intimacy is bad or too preoccupying to allow one to be close to God, but because "you wish to live in conformity with the will of God" and to respond to an individual call.

She speaks of "willing celibates" answering a vocation. Instead of relying on sex or individual intimacy as her source of fulfillment, she responded to a different call. She recognized that death/loss must occur in order for growth to take place. She quoted the following questions from a book by Louis

Fischer on Gandhi (also a willing celibate): "What should I fear? When was I less by dying?" In "dying" by embracing a celibate vocation, she was able to bring life to herself as well as to many others. As she wrote, "the final word is love. . . . We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community."

Celibacy is joyful and peaceful for the priest who suffers the renunciation and loss, who knows the long loneliness, and who properly sets out on the journey of grieving. A healthy sense of grief in making the choice authenticates the choice.

### TASKS OF GRIEVING PROCESS

There is general agreement that healthy resolution of the loss of any possibility of marriage, sexual intimacy, children, or family life requires the celibate to grieve and mourn. That process entails several important tasks.

**Task 1: Acknowledge the reality of the loss.** A celibate cannot begin the grieving process until he or she accepts the truth of the loss: I will never be a husband or wife, I will never have sexual relations with one I love, I will never have my own children, I will never be a grandparent. What do these losses feel like? Celibates need to imagine their possible partner and their possible children. They must see them, talk to them, tell them why they cannot exist, and say goodbye.

**Task 2: Identify and express the emotions of grief.** A celibate must express in words the intense feelings that accompany the loss. The healing process is very much aided when these feelings are shared with a trusted person; recall Dorothy Day's assertion that love comes with community. By ventilating powerful, painful emotions to another person, one makes an active declaration of trust. This declaration removes barriers of isolation, cynicism, and mistrust that so easily get erected after a sense of loss heightens one's sense of vulnerability. It is important to notice that so many priests accused of sexual abuse are persons who feel deep isolation and mistrust of others. Perhaps they have never undertaken task 2.

**Task 3: Commemorate the loss.** All cultures have developed rituals and customs of mourning to assist the grieving process (e.g., planning the funeral and burial services of a deceased loved one). Rituals need to be developed for the celibate to properly mourn what he or she is renouncing—perhaps as a part of candidacy, first vows, or final vows.



**Task 4: Acknowledge ambivalence.** This step constitutes one of the greatest challenges in the grieving process: to recognize conflicting feelings. Loss rarely leaves a clean wound. In his weekly audiences during 1982 and 1983, Pope John Paul II developed the idea of the complementarity of marriage and the celibate life in the context of a theology of the human body. Accepting celibacy is acknowledging the goodness of human sexuality and marriage. Celibacy is not choosing a good over a bad. Conflicting emotions are surely present.

**Task 5: Resolve the ambivalence.** The griever must achieve a balance between the conflicting feelings so that both positive and negative feelings are fully recognized and put into perspective. The celibate must be truly joyful and peaceful in his or her acceptance of the celibate way of life in order to reach this level of resolution. This comes about only upon clarification of one's motives for entering a celibate vocation (e.g., I am not entering the seminary to please my parents or to win approval from a priest). One is free in one's vocation when one truly owns that calling. This ownership comes only after an honest confrontation with one's true motives for pursuing such a vocation.

**Task 6: Let go.** The task consists of saying goodbye on an emotional rather than an intellectual level. This can happen only after all the previous steps have been visited and revisited. Joyce Rupp, O.S.M., speaks powerfully to this point in *Praying Our Goodbyes*:

All of us have those turns in the road. It is what we do or do not do with them that makes the difference. All too often we can let a life transition sit in our soul, discomfort us, empty us, discourage us and sometimes strangle us with its strong clenching hold. Too often we can ignore a goodbye or fight it or push it away, but we do not get rid of the ache in this way. It keeps raising its voice inside us, at times when we least expect. It drowns out the voice of joy in our life, bleeds our spirit of energy and enthusiasm; it destroys belief in our ability to rise from the ashes of our pain.

**Task 7: Move on.** This task requires the adoption of a present and future orientation. Hopes, dreams, plans, and aspirations must be restructured and reshaped in view of new realities. This step, dependent on the others, involves relinquishing/renouncing the hopes, dreams, plans, and aspirations that revolve around the option not chosen. The celibate must be free and joyful to make this step—a task that is truly a lifelong process.

## MOURNING LEADS TO ACCEPTANCE

Father Paul Theroux, executive director of the Secretariat for Vocations and Priestly Formation of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, maintains that "if priests are not happy or comfortable with what they are doing, they are less likely to invite others to join them as priests." Being happy and comfortable in one's celibate priesthood or religious life necessitates grieving. If the process of mourning is skipped, avoided, or interrupted, the priest/religious is at risk for manifesting distorted grief resolutions (e.g., alcoholism, workaholism, sexual abuse, anger, introversion). The celibate who does not grieve ends up a lonely individual, one who never really feels a part of religious or priestly life and falls into pits of depression and cynicism.

The so-called "embattled priesthood" might be made so much more irenic if the suffering of grieving were seen as critically important to a positive acceptance of celibacy, a welcoming that leads to a kind of inner resurrection, arousing a strength that creates a clarity about life's purpose and direction.



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# A Mission to Intimacy

*George J. Auger, C.S.V., M.A.*

*As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself, but must remain part of the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, and I in them, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me, you can do nothing. (John 15:5)*

**J**ohn's gospel is certainly one of intimacy. "Make your home in me, as I make mine in you. . . . As the Father loves me, so do I love you. Remain in my love. . . . I call you not servants, but friends. . . . You did not choose me, I chose you" (John 15). Jesus is the vine; we are the branches. Our fruitfulness depends on our union with the vine. In him we can do everything, without him nothing lasting. In other words, our ministry and mission as Christian disciples are rooted in, with, and through Jesus. The title of this article is quite simply a reminder that in the end, our first and most telling mission lies in intimacy with the Lord. It is more a matter of *being* in him than *doing* for him. Indeed, in John's gospel the latter flows naturally from the former; otherwise, "doing for him" risks becoming "doing for self" in subtle and unperceived ways.

## MISSION AS DOING

The church has an ecclesial mission, and the people who make up the church are instrumental in

carrying that mission out. Basically, the mission is to bring good news to the poor, liberty to captives, sight to the blind, and freedom to the downtrodden (Isa. 42:6-7; Luke 4:18). The vineyard is in need of laborers (Matt. 9:38). As Christians, our call is to labor in the Lord's vineyard. Many religious and laypersons do this with utter dedication, sometimes to the point of exhaustion and even burnout, and our hearts go out to them.

When mission is seen as geared almost exclusively toward active ministry, it can be rather easily articulated, schematized, and presented in exciting and appealing ways, ways aglow with the enthusiasm of building up the Reign of God. Psychosociological studies, surveys, and successful models drawn from the world of business are important points of reference that permit us to see where we are, where we want to go, and the necessary means to get there. As a religious, I have seen and studied such documents in many recent publications on the future of religious life. Such documents seek, above all, to be evangelical, practical, and effective, yet inherent in some of them is what I consider a certain shortsightedness. By this I mean that mission is seen almost exclusively in terms of doing, and men and women are viewed primarily as doers of ministry. This shortsightedness seems rooted in the view that what really counts in ministry is efficiency, effectiveness, and measurable positive results. Surely prayer, witness, and the hiddenness of



the contemplative dimension in all of us are necessary—indeed, are part of mission—but on a practical level, what can one say about them? How does one measure them? How does one adequately judge their effectiveness?

Intellectually, we divide mission into two separate arenas: the apostolic (exterior) and the contemplative (interior). It is far easier to articulate the former. We are more comfortably competent at dealing with active ministry as something apart from and exterior to the person accomplishing his or her mission. As someone once noted, Westerners are far more aptly described as “human doings” than as “human beings.”

We are Aristotelian to the core, and very much at home with Descartes. We analyze and divide to understand better. It almost seems that once we have intellectually grasped a subject, we can in some way possess, master, and even control it. We Westerners conquer Mount Everest, whereas Easterners make friends with Mount Everest. It is far easier to conceive of mission as something external to us, something we do, something we can discuss objectively and intelligently.

Mission and one's life in Christ are correlative. To separate them is to create a false dichotomy; it does justice to neither. The two are facets of the same reality. One has but to think of the vitally important mission of the aged or the sick—those incapable, by the design of a loving God, of exercising an active ministry. Is it not perhaps the living prayer of their life in Christ that is holding this crazy world of ours together? Their deepest mission is their mission in Christ. To work more effectively in hiddenness seems to be God's mysterious and unfathomable way (Rom. 11:33–36). One might even say that the most effective ministry will always go unseen.

## MISSION AS BEING

*... What I do is me: for that I came.  
I say more: the just man justifies;  
Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces;  
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is—  
Christ—for Christ plays in ten thousand places,  
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his  
To the Father through the features of men's faces.  
(From “As Kingfishers Catch Fire,”  
Gerard Manley Hopkins)*

If instead of separating my life in Christ from mission, I unite them, then I become mission and my spiritual life becomes, at its deepest core, mission. Here one goes far beyond, and deeper than, sheer (no matter how well planned) mission activity. We are in fact dealing with “Mission Before Mission,” as

A. Dominic notes in *Review for Religious* (Jan.-Feb. 1993)—an existential and holistic view of mission and the spiritual life. On a practical level, this means that any discussion of mission will, by its very nature, speak of conversion, both personal and corporate; prayer, the evangelical root of mission; the scriptural grounds for being “sent”; and true brotherhood/sisterhood and all those traits marking the advent of God's Reign in our world today. Our gospel witness is a witness to the living presence of our Risen Lord—a presence that frees, heals, and is Good News, and this in whatever mission activity. The fundamental questions will always be, “Am I Jesus for those to whom I minister? Do I have the heart and mind of the Lord?” I am reminded of a short prayer written by Cardinal Newman, which I paraphrase here from memory:

Lord Jesus, may I be the radiance of your presence everywhere. Flood my whole being with your Life and your Spirit. Penetrate and possess me so utterly that all that I am and all that I do may be but a reflection of you. Shine through me and be so in me that all those with whom I come into contact may see not me but only Jesus.

I was recently invited to attend a meeting of a group seeking to recreate a faltering commission on social ministries. Instead of actually forming a commission, the group decided to gather together with someone who would lead the group in a few days of shared scriptural reflection and prayer within the context of ministry to the poor and marginalized. One young man, rightly or wrongly, insisted that this facilitating person be one who was somehow implicated in this ministry and not, as he said, “an expert in scripture.” He wanted to be guided by a person who somehow lived scripture within the context of social ministry. What the group wanted, I believe, was to be guided into a deeper relationship with Jesus and his mission. Having previously faltered on an ideological or theoretical level, the group did not want to organize before having met together in Christ. In the end, it is not what one does that matters most, but rather how, and with and in whom, one does it.

## JESUS IS MISSION

To quote an expression used by Richard Rohr, “Jesus really did nothing. He let the Father do it.” In Jesus' person, God is sent. Jesus is himself mission: he is liberty to captives, sight to the blind, freedom to the downtrodden. In his person, he is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Jesus is, in a word, our deepest mission. To state that redemption is in Christ Jesus is truer than stating that Jesus accomplished the work of redemption.



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## The disciple who does not follow God's call to intimacy and does not allow grace to act in his or her life will never come to know the deepest meaning of life or let that life come to its proper fulfillment

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During the three years of his public ministry, Jesus never seemed to hurry to get things done. Certainly, organization was not his forte. His teachings were achieved through the authority of his person, unlike the teaching of the Scribes and Pharisees. The calling of the apostles seems rooted far more in fascination than in marvelous deeds, the antecedent of which was always faith. Jesus' gentle compassion, truthful confrontation, and intimacy with the Father, as well as the quiet understanding and loving forgiveness that enfolded his person, drew others to him. The Word of God was love incarnate, and when Jesus touched others at their deepest core, they responded with abandonment. The human person, made to love and be loved, finds fulfillment in him (Col. 2:9). The disciple who does not follow God's call to intimacy and does not allow grace to act in his or her life will never come to know the deepest meaning of life or let that life come to its proper fulfillment. As Christians our mission is to fulfill life abundantly, and the breath of that life is prayer. This, I might add, is essentially the message of John of the Cross. In the longest commentary of his *Canticles* (29:3) he writes:

Let those who are singularly active, who think they can win the world with their preaching and exterior works, observe here that they would profit the Church and please God much more, not to mention the good example they would give, were they to spend at least half this time with God in prayer. . . . Without prayer they would do a great deal of hammering but accomplish little, and sometimes nothing, and even at times cause harm.

God forbid that the salt should begin to lose its savor (Matt. 5:13), for however much they may appear to achieve externally, they will in substance be accomplishing nothing.

As Christians ministering in the Lord's vineyard, we too have been fascinated by the Word who is Love:

Something which has existed since the beginning, that we have heard, and we have seen with our own eyes; that we have watched and touched with our hands: the Word, who is life—this is our subject. (1 John 1:1)

It is the deepest root-source of our vocation, perhaps not fully recognized in early years but grasped ever more fully with time, prayer, trials, stumblings, conversions, and ministry.

Christ-mission is, often without one's realizing it, the richest source of one's scriptural prayer life. As we read, ponder, and pray over scriptures, we are far more drawn to the person of Jesus than we are to his works. His ministry always draws us back to his person, which in turn leads us to the Father and the gift of the Holy Spirit abiding in our "hidden self" (Eph. 3:17, Rev. 2:17). This is the loving trinitarian presence. The Christ-mission, God's presence within us, is a constant theme in Saint Paul's letters (Gal. 1:15–16, 2:20; Phil. 1:21; Col. 3:3–4; Rom. 8:10–11).

### LIVES OF INTIMACY

A prophet is, as was Jesus, a living parable pointing beyond self. It is the person of the prophet who touches most significantly. The prophet's message is given life in his or her person.

The primary mission of most prophets of our day has been the mission of their lives, the mission of their being. We remember Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Teilhard de Chardin, Pedro Arrupe, and many others for the living truth of their lives. Surely, their accomplishments were many and tremendously significant, but they were always authenticated by lives of intimacy with the Lord. Their mission was rooted in prayer; their accomplishments were not theirs but God's. Perhaps that is why their lives are marked with simplicity and humble truthfulness; perhaps that is why there is usually a touch of humor whenever they speak of their accomplishments. It is through the wonder of empty hands that God's most marvelous deeds are done. This is a constant theme in the Old Testament—in Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Hosea, and of course in the lovely story of Gideon's reduced army (Judg. 7).

Like many who have labored long and hard in the Lord's vineyard, prayerfully pondering their lives and ministry, the prophets came to an awareness that it was not their work that meant most, but rather their persons—their life in Christ, shared and nourished in the brotherhood and sisterhood of those to whom



they ministered. Is not this the lived message of the Acts of the Apostles?

Documents and mission statements may well be prophetic—many strive to be so—but in themselves, they are not life-giving, and although they may quote scripture (and it is hoped that they do), they are not the Word of God. The granite ground of all such documents has to be Christ-mission or they will remain shortsighted and superficial. They will be superficial as long as they aim solely to revamp ministry in terms of activity, neglecting or forgetting the ultimate Christ-mission of the Christian who has, by his or her calling, a prophetic mission. If the renewal of ministerial structures does not encompass a renewal of one's (or a group's) spiritual life, it means little in concrete existential reality. One could go so far as to say that such "renewal" may well prove to be the silken shroud of a dying endeavor.

### FOCUS IS IMPORTANT

In this brief article, I have attempted to bring into sharper focus the Christocentric and trinitarian ground of mission. I have viewed mission primarily in terms of being rather than doing because I believe that such a focus is important today. Documentation on the topic of ministry must not neglect this element or put it aside for later consideration. At times mission documents are logically clear and competently articulated, yet the light of Christ does not shine through. One sometimes gets the impression that those drawing up such statements feel they must include such items as prayer and conversion. At times, however, the contrary is all too evident, and one can point out instances in which effectiveness takes precedence over the spiritual life of the minister. Such, certainly, is the case when the spiritual life of those who minister becomes subservient to a set of complex structures—and this, unfortunately, happens in the name of the ecclesial mission of the church.

Bearing fruit aplenty means being one with the vine and receiving from that vine the life and nourish-

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**If the renewal of ministerial structures does not encompass a renewal of one's (or a group's) spiritual life, it means little in concrete existential reality**

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ment we hope to share with others. "Whoever remains in me, and I in them, bears fruit in plenty" (John 15:5).

### RECOMMENDED READING

- Aschenbrenner, G. "Active and Monastic: Two Apostolic Lifestyles." *Review for Religious* (Sept.-Oct. 1986): 653-68.
- Dominic, A. "Mission Before Mission: God's Mission Within Us." *Review for Religious* (Jan.-Feb. 1993): 119-130.
- Kavanaugh, K. *Teresa of Avila: The Interior Castle*. New York, New York: Paulist Press, 1979.
- Nygren, D., and M. Ukeritis. "The Future of Religious Orders in the United States." *Origins* 22, no. 15 (24 September 1992).



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# Conference Retreats Highlight Adult Learning

*Doreen D. Kostyniuk, M.Ed.;  
and Catherine Labinowich, O.S.B.*

**A**t a course for facilitators at St. Benedict's Educational Centre in Winnipeg, Manitoba, we were challenged to evaluate our own attitudes in our retreat ministry and to question how our present learning experience could be applied to our work. The course, entitled "Developing Facilitating Skills," was generated and conducted by Marge Denis of Huntsville, Ontario. Its intent was to expose participants to the process of adult learning and to help them develop the skills needed to facilitate such learning, while honoring the inner resources already present in the learner.

This article focuses predominantly on conference or preached retreats—that is, retreats in which a director presents several conferences to a group each day. We hope, through this article, to open a dialogue with others involved in retreat ministry. By drawing on some of the principles of adult learning, we may increase ways of facilitating the disposition for spiritual growth in individuals who choose conference retreats.

Learning, we believe, is as natural as breathing, and is both a spiritual journey and a way of life. Using the seed as an image of the potential within the human being, which is both limited and limitless, we see in each person a form of seed meant to sprout, to grow, to bloom, and in time to bear fruit. God intends this, for each of us was created in God's own image.

A retreat is an opportunity to stir up the soil of our spirits, to fertilize, to irrigate, to tend the tiny seed so that it may grow more into God's likeness. Being made in God's image implies carrying a potential, and in this the disposition to grace lies: being in God's likeness implies the actualization of that potential.

Since Vatican II, religious and lay people have had a variety of retreats from which to choose. People have different reasons for choosing a particular retreat. A community or parish may choose a conference retreat to encourage the revitalization of the communal spirit. Such an event can also be a practical means of reaching many people at one time and can lay the foundation for follow-up and further growth together. There are, however, limitations to this approach.

Those who attend a retreat are not all at the same stage of development and may not have the same needs. It seems to us essential, therefore, that those who organize retreats have a basic understanding of adult stages of growth, as well as principles of adult learning. This awareness has led us to approach each conference retreat as a learning process.

## INSIGHTS INTO RETREAT EXPERIENCE

For purposes of research, we asked specific questions of the ten lay and religious women who partic-



ipated in the facilitators' course. Their replies indicated that some individuals attended conference retreats because it was the expectation of their congregation, community, or parish. Others went because the speaker, theme, or place attracted them. Still others were seeking a change or a place of peace, rest, and quiet; the conferences came as part of the package. We also found that certain elements of our respondents' conference retreat experiences had enhanced growth, whereas other components had inhibited it.

**Factors that enhanced growth:** The retreat directors were well prepared, delivered what they said they would, and practiced what they preached ("What she says, she is"). They owned and shared their own life experiences. They came across as persons in process rather than experts. Their qualities of humanness, honesty, openness, gentleness with firmness, humor, and aliveness inspired and empowered their listeners. They were person-oriented and made themselves available to meet with individuals. They provided a variety of processes through which the retreatants became intensely engaged with their own inner God-journeys, with the retreat content, and with one another.

**Factors that inhibited growth:** The retreat directors came across as unprepared. Their delivery was often poor, boring, morose, negative, or stiff, or they frequently communicated a message of "hellfire and damnation" that was harsh, threatening, and guilt-inducing. The directors just lectured, engaging only the intellect of the listeners. One person used the term "Father knows best" to indicate that a retreat was director-centered and patriarchal; the director focused only on his own knowledge. Another described her retreat director's approach as the "jug and mug method" ("I'll pour it into you"). Still another felt depersonalized by being talked down to by the director.

A common criticism was that the format lacked variety. Some of our respondents complained that they had no opportunity for community or group interaction and that the director did not share his or her own life experience with them. As a result, the retreatants were passive and unmoved. Another element that affected retreatants negatively was poor ambiance (e.g., one retreat room was poorly furnished and dark).

## LEARNING AND CHANGE SYNONYMOUS

Our own lived experience and the experience of those who have been part of our retreats have shown us that process is a spiritual dynamic, while learning is a spiritual reality. Learning and change are syn-

onymous. The disposition to grace is in reality standing before and within the tender, transforming passion of God. It is here that we are taught, led, changed, healed, made whole, and opened to receive Love. As retreat directors, we need to be aware that we are simply one of the channels in the whole milieu that facilitates the disposition to grace. A retreat is a point of invitation, and the director a companion on the journey toward the One who is Eternal Invitation and Presence.

When we look at a conference retreat as a milieu for being disposed to grace, we see a direct link between what we do and how we learn, and what happens to us in the learning. We have chosen Virginia Griffin's *Principles of Adult Learning* as a basis for our dialogue, because we feel that they embody a respect for life and are a good foundation for facilitating the disposition to grace. Griffin, who is on the faculty of the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education (Toronto, Ontario), sees the learner holistically. We have adapted her principles, which empower the learner, to fit our purpose of tapping the potential for growth within conference retreats.

## PRINCIPLES OF ADULT LEARNING

**Disposition to grace is enhanced when the climate or the environment fosters self-esteem and interdependence.** In such a setting:

- people feel they are accepted, revered, and treasured by God, as well as by the retreat facilitator and the other retreatants;
- people are encouraged to be open about themselves;
- differences among individuals are seen as desirable and good;
- mistakes and failures are perceived as opportunities for spiritual growth;
- whatever participants share is received by the director and other retreatants;
- retreatants' experiences, attitudes, and knowledge are recognized and built upon.

The retreat director may apply this principle in the following ways:

- by providing reflective questions and suggested readings to facilitate the interaction between the retreatants' lived experience and God's Word;
- by making gathering places available for small-group sharing around what was awakened in them in relation to themselves, others, and God (depending on the nature of the retreat and the degree of silence desired);



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## The greatest potential for growth through a conference retreat can be realized only if the retreat director truly fills the role of facilitator

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- by giving attention to ambiance: for example, arranging chairs so that everyone can see and hear; planning appropriate lighting, flower arrangements, and other enhancements that help retreatants feel cared for and respected.

**Disposition to grace is enhanced when the retreatants expect that the outcomes will have meaning for their lives.** The following conditions foster this principle:

- receiving what the retreatants already know and the strengths they already have;
- recognizing the journey they have already taken;
- uncovering the retreatants' needs and setting goals through personal prayer and/or interaction with the director;
- allowing goals for the retreat to evolve as the retreat progresses rather than establishing them firmly at the beginning.

The retreat director may apply this principle in the following ways:

- by posing reflection questions: How do I come? What do I need from God in coming to this retreat? What is my deepest desire regarding the direction of my life?
- by inviting participants to share their written responses to such questions, and noting their remarks on a flip chart that becomes a point of reference throughout the retreat;
- by sharing something of his or her experience and expressing what he or she desires in this time together;

- by sharing some of the fruits of his or her own journey;
- by incorporating ritual expression befitting the theme to facilitate right-brain activity (e.g., creative movement, drawing, song).

**Disposition to grace is enhanced when retreatants have an active role in decision making and planning for the retreat.** When the authority is shared:

- the competency of retreatants as learners, as disciples, and as choice makers for their own lives is recognized (e.g., each retreatant is free to choose which conferences or activities to participate in);
- participative decision making happens throughout the retreat experience through the use of periodic evaluations.

The retreat director may apply this principle in the following ways:

- by providing options in scripture passages and readings from other sources;
- by providing choices among group sharing experiences, centering prayer, or meditation;
- by providing opportunities for individual sessions with the director or a retreat companion.

**Disposition to grace is enhanced when a synergistic view of God is held.** In such a view, God is greater than such metaphors as Father, Mother, or Creator. Conditions fostering this principle include:

- activities that promote the individuals' personal meeting with God and enhance their awareness in the naming of God's action and presence in their lives;
- the understanding that a retreat is a time when the director and the retreatants are engaged in a mutual exploration and discovery of revelation.

The retreat director may apply this principle in the following ways:

- by encouraging journal keeping;
- by attending to and reflecting on his or her dreams and encouraging the retreatants to do the same;
- by fostering a consciousness of nature as a gift and a revelation;
- by encouraging group sharing so that the participants' images of God can be both confronted and enriched.

**Disposition to grace is enhanced when retreatants are given opportunities to work with the insights**



**and experiences they have during the retreat.** This entails conditions such as the following:

- giving retreatants the chance to ask their own questions and to seek out information that will help them formulate their own answers;
- giving retreatants opportunities to articulate, formulate, and clarify their insights or thoughts;
- encouraging retreatants to participate actively and to make responses;
- giving retreatants opportunities to practice new behaviors in a safe, supportive context;
- enabling retreatants to admit and own their emotions around input and prayer experiences.

The retreat director may apply this principle in the following ways:

- by using guided imagery;
- by having retreatants work with clay;
- by engaging retreatants in role playing.

**Disposition to grace is enhanced when retreatants evaluate their own responses to grace, to learning outcomes, and to the need for more change.** This principle is fostered:

- by providing a process that facilitates self-evaluation;
- by gathering the fruits of the retreat;
- by carrying the learning outcomes into the future, through guided imagery, to get a sense of how they fit;
- by inviting the participants to reflect on the next step of their spiritual journey.

The retreat director may apply this principle in the following ways:

- by providing an evaluation sheet with questions addressing the retreatants' experience, call to conversion, and response to God;

- by encouraging the retreatants to use what has emerged from the retreat as the basis for follow-up monthly recollection days and/or spiritual direction.

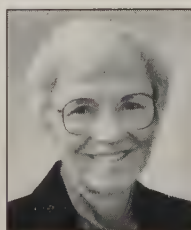
## EFFECTIVENESS OF DIRECTOR CRUCIAL

As retreat directors, our primary goal is to facilitate the disposition to grace. The principles described above can empower directors of conference retreats to maximize learning, change, conversion, and transformation.

Conference retreats can be a valid and rich resource for many. However, seeing the task simply as conference giving limits the effectiveness of such retreats. The greatest potential for growth can be realized only if the retreat director truly fills the role of facilitator—by helping participants to identify what they need to know or want to change, by providing a variety of resources to help them begin to achieve their goals, and by creating an environment that encourages them to be honest with themselves and to share with God and one another.



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# Renewal Groups' Role Redefined

*David Coghlan, S.J., Ph.D.*

**T**he ongoing renewal of contemporary church and religious life typically involves the assembly of groups to create or implement policy. For instance, a bishop or major superior may have several permanent commissions or groups that monitor, administer, or advise on policy regarding particular areas of ministry, such as education, health care, continuing formation, or the development of ministry. On occasion, temporary task forces or committees may be set up to investigate and advise on particular aspects of ministry or living and to submit reports to a major superior or bishop. Such uses of permanent or temporary groups are key mechanisms for the development of policy and the generation of commitment to change by participation in the process of policy formulation. The contribution to the development of policy comes through the involvement of a variety of selected individuals who are invited to be members of such groups on the basis of their experience and expertise. Groups help form commitment through the group members' participation in decision making and through their consultation with the wider membership of the order, province, or diocese.

Commissions and committees have been used in the church for generations, especially since Vatican II, when the agenda for change gained momentum.

Many religious, some clergy, and probably too few laity have served on church commissions, task forces, and committees. For some, participation in such groups has been a deeply significant experience, and the work accomplished has been of high quality. But other participants are left with sad or bitter memories of political conflict, polarized viewpoints, and failure to resolve fundamental differences that kept the group from adequately addressing its task. Or perhaps some work was done—many hours spent in discussion, lots of notes generated, a report submitted—but the group never really came to terms with its task or took full advantage of the potential of its members. Participants who have such experiences are often reluctant to serve on a commission again.

## LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

The church has so frequently assembled commissions, task forces, and committees that we can reflect on our use of them and see what it is we have learned about them—particularly in terms of how they can contribute to the renewal of a province, order, or diocese. Religious now understand much more about how groups work than we did in the early years after Vatican II. We have participated in many different types of groups—encounter and faith-sharing



groups, ministry teams, management boards, communities, commissions—and many of us have read about or studied group theory. This knowledge can help us use groups to greater effect and generally improve group process. We can attend to issues of group dynamics, help a group develop and maintain its objectives, uncover governing norms, and evaluate the effect of leadership style.

Recent years have seen the emergence of theories and experience of the spirituality of groups, focusing particularly on how groups engage in discernment, how groups develop in terms of faith and spirituality and experience consolation or desolation, and how corporate spirituality is a core ingredient of process for those who live and work out of a faith perspective. Theories of how organizations learn are also being developed. Some of the contemporary literature on organizational change and learning indicates that secular organizations are just beginning to discover what religious orders struggled through twenty years ago (it is somewhat amusing to find the word *metanoia* in a book about organizations and to read that managers need to learn how to engage in *dialogue*). As organizational theory focuses on the corporate learning process, we may gain insights into an issue that has generally been undeveloped in the literature on renewal in the church: how church and religious systems (e.g., orders, provinces, dioceses) can renew themselves as organizations.

## CONTENT AND PROCESS

I aim to address the issue of how commissions, task forces, and committees can be used to greater effect in light of the developments noted. My reflections are based on my process consultation work with commissions and task forces and my academic work in the field of organizational development, in which I have thought about how church and religious systems can better understand and manage the process of corporate renewal.

All working groups have to deal with *task* and *relational* issues (i.e., those regarding the work to be done and the working relationships of the members). These two areas each comprise issues of content and process. In the task area, content refers to what is to be done, and process to how it is to be done. In the relational area, content refers to the group members' work with one another, and process to how the group works.

### THE TASK AREA

For commissions, task forces, and committees, the task content is the work to be done, whether it be for-

mulation of policy or provision of advice to a superior, and whether it regards a specialized area of ministry or all ministries. The starting point for any working group is clarification of the task. What is the group being asked to do? What are the limits of the task? What is the time frame? The group must strive to define its task clearly and to explore members' assumptions about the task and interpretations of its significance.

Task process refers to how the group goes about its task. In my experience, a most valuable way of approaching the sort of task assigned to commissions, task forces, and committees is to begin by conceiving what the members of the group would like to see achieved by the end of their term. As a consultant, I frequently guide groups through exercises such as the following: "Picture yourselves passing the baton to the next commission in three years' time. What state do you want the ministry to be in by then? In order to get the ministry to that state, what core issues will you have to address, and to what extent, during your term of office?" I also assign some personal reflection and prayer time for each individual member, after which the group convenes to share individual visions and to begin building consensus. This sort of activity enables the group to look at the big picture at the outset rather than getting stuck on details too soon. It helps the group take hold of its task and set the direction of its work. Beginning with defining the desired outcome and then looking at the present to see what needs to be done in order to achieve that outcome helps a group establish a sense of purpose and maintain its focus. (This approach is more fully described in my article "Managing Apostolic Change," which appeared in the Summer 1990 issue of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT.)

### THE RELATIONAL AREA

For the advisory group, commission, or task force, there are three key systemic relationships: relations within the group itself, relations with the executive (i.e., major superior and council, bishop), and relations with the other members of the province or diocese.

Relations within the group require an ability to work together in such a way that the work gets done and that the individual members contribute actively to the task. Group members have different areas of expertise and competence. They also have different life experiences in ministry. There is typically a variety of personality types in any group. Understanding individual differences and how they contribute to the life and purpose of the group is the core of the relational content within the group.



Relations with the executive require an initial dialogue on the nature and meaning of the task. The group needs to understand the major superior's or bishop's idea of the desired outcome, or to help him or her develop one. If a group develops policy away from what the executive is comfortable with, its work may be ignored or overridden. Therefore, the agreed meaning of the assigned task must be articulated, and the progress of the group's efforts must be continuously communicated to the executive to ensure that there are no surprises. The executive should know what the group is doing, and the group should know what the executive wants and expects.

Relations within the group and with the members of the wider system (province or diocese) is perhaps the most neglected relational area. How often do we see the work of commissions and task forces perceived as irrelevant and ignored unless the executive personally reinforces it? When formal consultation with the wider system is part of the group's task, it is often such a painful experience that group members resolve never to serve on a commission again. The relational content of the relationship between the group and the general membership is a crucial determinant of whether or not the group's work will be a mechanism for the renewal of the whole system. I will return to this point later.

The processes of managing each of these three key relationships are critical for any task force or commission, whether permanent or temporary. The group must consciously take account of the existence of these relationships and monitor them at the different stages of the group's work. Because these relationships are systemic, they are in relationship with each other (e.g., the group's relationship with the executive affects relations within the group and the group's relationship with the wider system). Neglect of one set of relationships will have a negative effect on the other sets.

## BEING A LEARNING GROUP

Thus far, I have focused attention on how the work of commissions can be improved within the existing frame of reference—that is, how groups might make adjustments in their present way of approaching issues of content and process. What is really required is a *transformation* of the present frame of reference, whereby a different concept of task forces and commissions is formulated, with a different articulation of the values and, consequently, the implications of the behavior and process of these groups. Such a transformation might be achieved by conceiving of them as learning groups, in the sense that the group members

themselves learn and then serve as a learning mechanism for the rest of the system.

A learning group is one that consciously attends to the dynamics of its own learning. Accordingly, attention is given not only to monitoring the group dynamics (including process issues regarding communication, decision making, and forms of meetings) but also to articulating what the group is learning about its task and how to perform it. The key element of a learning group in a religious context is the deliberate focus on and attention to the spiritual dynamics of the group.

There is a continuing development of awareness and skills in integrating the dynamics of working groups with the dynamics of shared spirituality—what Judith Roemer refers to as “the contemplative life in prayer and the contemplative life in the group meeting.” Such an integration involves building on the faith experience of the individual participants and then helping them function together as a community of faith. This may be achieved by planning faith-sharing activities for the group's initial meeting in order to establish an atmosphere, a psychological contract, and norms that allow the work of the commission to be influenced and directed by the Word of God. Faith sharing then becomes an integral part of how the group works.

## REFLECTION ON PROCESS ESSENTIAL

As the group goes about its work—identifying issues, selecting options, and reaching consensus on proposals, goals, or action—it must build into its process activities of problem analysis, problem solving, and generation of alternative solutions. Together, the group members must also reflect on those activities, analyze their progress toward the goal, question their assumptions, and take all that to prayer. The quality of process and relationships must be such that the Holy Spirit can work in the group. Reflection on the process involves being aware of the group's periods of desolation or consolation and noting the movements of the Good or Bad Spirit.

If quality of group life is to develop in a commission whose members' analytical work is harmonized with a communal faith that attends to the movements of the Spirit within the group, each member must also attend to the movements in his or her own heart and mind. That involves listening to oneself, noting one's own reactions to what is said by other members, and questioning one's own assumptions in the light of those reactions and in the light of others' views. It also involves questioning others' assumptions in order to most fully hear and understand what they are saying. This is particularly



important when words like *community*, *togetherness*, and *mission* are used—words that we frequently and mistakenly assume to have the same meanings for everyone. Questioning and helping to articulate assumptions is not unlike the sort of testing/understanding activity performed by a therapist, spiritual director, or fellow community member in the process of psychological counseling, spiritual direction, or community sharing. Among members of a commission, however, it has a different focus and aim: not to clarify feelings but to build mutual understanding and arrive at new, shared assumptions in order to advance the task. In other words, it is a task-focused dialogue.

In one consultation, I gave a group the task of articulating how it was going to work and formulating a charter for itself. When the group reported back to me, one member said that she and the others had not really gotten into the task; instead, they had chatted a good deal and taken care of other, more immediate business, such as electing a chairperson and secretary. She then suggested that the “post-lunch blues” might have been a factor in this situation. For me this was an example of a group not questioning its assumptions about what was happening. Raising the question of why the group was not working on its task might well have brought out that the task was unclear, that it was threatening, or that some members did not know how to approach it. Because that particular commission never raised that question, the members did not engage in such a learning process.

### CONTROLLING PROCESS QUALITY

Being a learning group involves pausing to see where convergences and divergences are and what they mean, and facing ambiguities, anxieties, differences, feelings of alienation, or boredom, all of which can thwart a group’s work. If the group can learn to bring these variables into the open and deal with them, then it is learning a more effective way of achieving its task than if it permits these factors to continue to have an unacknowledged negative effect on the group. In the same vein, if the group is to complete its work effectively, it is essential for the members to be aware of shifts between consolation and desolation, as well as temptations to fold under pressure and follow the Bad Spirit. Typically, these phenomena exist in the wider system as well, and are part of why change is so difficult. Bringing them into the open in a safe environment and dealing with them can be a significant mechanism for facilitating change within the group as well as in the wider system.

One practical way a commission can control the quality of its process and facilitate being a learning group is by distinguishing between different types of meetings and processes. There may be times when it is sufficient for the group to meet for two hours, during which the members receive reports, look at data, and plan a next step. At other times it may be more appropriate to meet for half a day, a whole day, or a weekend to allow time and space to study the material in depth, take time for prayer, reflection, and review, and allow the Spirit to inform the group.

Another concrete tool is to appoint a group member to take responsibility for the group’s learning process. Just as the group may appoint a chairperson and secretary, it may also designate a member responsible for ensuring that reflection time is not whittled away and that the group regularly takes time to review its process and its learning. Some groups may choose to have members share this responsibility on a rotating basis. Occasionally, it may be useful, particularly during longer meetings, to bring in a consultant to serve as a facilitator and group spiritual director.

Attention to what the group is learning can be structured around personal reports that provoke a group response: I have thought about . . . , and I think that . . . ; I have prayed about . . . , and I sense that . . . ; I have listened to others and now think that . . . ; I am aware within myself that . . . ; What I think we are being called to is. . . .

These sorts of reports can help a group note what is being *thought* and do its analytical work. Having done its analytical work, the group can then go deeper into the world of the Spirit and *sense* what is emerging from prayer. Having sensed what is happening within the individual members and the group, the group may hear the *call* to a particular action, which then must be prayed about in an effort to seek confirmation. Clearly, this is not a logical or linear sequence, and I am not attempting to simplify a complex, unpredictable journey of faith. The dynamics of such a process are well described in the spirituality literature. I am simply summarizing the kind of process a commission must undertake if it is to be a learning group in a faith context.

### HELPING ORGANIZATIONS LEARN

One of the reasons that the process of creating a learning group is important is that it can act as a model for the rest of the system’s activities. If a commission meets, draws up recommendations, and passes them on to an executive for approval and implementation, but the executive doesn’t approve those recommendations, the problem may lie partly



in how the group has worked, how the group relates to the executive, and how it relates to the rest of the system. In the context of the change required in the church, whether in general or within specific ministries, major issues are at stake for religious orders and dioceses. Change is now necessary; it is no longer an option. Accordingly, enormous responsibilities are borne by those commissions and task forces established to help move change forward. It isn't acceptable now, after so many years of using groups in the church in an attempt to manage change, to set up commissions and have them do work that is ignored or ineffective.

In the system, change is typically marked by no small amount of fear and anxiety, insecurity about the future, ambivalence, conflict about whether or not change is wanted, and conflict about what should change, to name a few of the common issues. Individuals and human systems require a sense of psychological safety in order to move from the security of the present to a changed state. Accordingly, the management of change requires that such a sense of psychological safety be created to help individuals and groups face and deal with the anxieties that accompany change. Individuals or groups can in effect hold a community, province, or diocese for ransom and block any substantive change or discussion about change. Major superiors and their councils spend lots of time discussing how individuals and communities are blocked and how they might help change move forward. The change process typically fails to engage the actual integration of prayer and action in dealing with the struggles inherent in change. If prayer were directed toward the hurts that exist in the system, and if a group or community could prayerfully face the real issues that are actual forces in a given situation, then change could genuinely be led by the Spirit.

## MODELING CHANGE-ORIENTED WORK

Modeling is one significant way in which the work of commissions and task forces can contribute to large-system change. Through the transition period, if the members of a commission work in such a way as to deal productively with their fears, anxieties, tensions, trepidations, uncertainties, and conflicts, as well as the enormity of the task, the complexity of the issues, and the insecurity of the future, and if they can do all that through their shared faith and the spirituality of the system (whether religious order or diocese), then that commission will serve as a learning model for the whole system. Therefore, the task of a commission is not only to produce policy but also to enable the rest of the system to change

and learn. In organizational development, this process is referred to as creating a "parallel learning structure"—that is, a structure whereby a commission consciously works in a way that is different from the typical approach of the system. In their book *Parallel Learning Structures: Increasing Innovation in Bureaucracies*, Gervase Bushe and A. B. Shani note that "parallel learning structures create a time and space where the norms and routines of the organization are suspended so that different patterns of work and interaction that are necessary for innovation can take place." Because action and spirituality tend not to be integrated in the normal working of teams within the system, conflict is typically avoided and not taken seriously to prayer. But a commission that works in an atypical manner can bring what it has learned from the experience to the rest of the system, particularly because the atypical behavior stems from core religious values and attention to the process of the group's spiritual experience.

## LEARNING THROUGHOUT LARGER SYSTEMS

How does a large, complex system such as a religious order or a diocese learn? Such a question encourages reflection on the operative theories of learning. One dominant learning model is the rational-empirical model, in which documents articulating policy are presented for all to assent to and follow, much in the way teachers' materials are presented in classrooms for students to accept. Yet experience has shown such an approach to be flawed. It doesn't help people deal with the fears that might accompany a proposal for change. It doesn't take account of how individuals identify with groups and are socialized into the culture of those groups, or the fact that changing a culture requires more than an edict to change collective assumptions and habits. The church has internalized newer learning models from its experiences in spiritual direction and therapy, yet it hasn't developed their potential in terms of managing change.

An effective approach to learning and change is one that helps deal with anxiety and fear of change. If commissions and task forces work as parallel learning structures in a way that encourages learning about fear and anxiety, then dioceses and religious orders have a mechanism for actively helping to make that learning possible. Edgar Schein articulates four assumptions in this regard:

*"One cannot ask others to learn something new if one has not learned something new oneself."* On the basis of this assumption, one may conclude that if a commission has learned how to understand and manage the conflicts and anxieties provoked by



change, it can help the rest of the system to do so.

*"Learning in this complex area involves stepping outside one's own culture before one can discover the limitations of one's present culture and possibilities inherent in other cultures."* This assumption focuses on how working in a manner that builds on shared spiritual experience and attends to process opens up ways of working with the rest of the system.

*"Anxieties inherent in this new learning situation are only manageable if they are shared and managed jointly in a group which is accountable for the ultimate welfare of the organization."* This assumption is the basis for the argument that when groups are commissioned with the task of developing a particular aspect of policy, they should be accountable for how the change process works.

*"Learning will not be spread across the entire organization unless a change/transition management group is created which will be accountable for organizational learning."* The focus of this assumption is the idea that commissions and task forces should be given the task of consciously helping to develop learning in the rest of the system. This can happen only if a commission itself goes through a learning process that involves dealing with the difficult issues in a manner congruent with the spiritual and psychological dynamics of the group.

## TRANSFORMATION IS KEY

I have argued that the role of task forces and commissions in the work of policy formulation and renewal can be transformed by turning them into learning groups—that is, groups that attend to their own learning and then act as vehicles for the organization's learning. Such a transformation is integrally linked to attention to the spiritual dynamics of a group and is achieved by modeling a way of working

in which the group consciously questions assumptions, faces fears in the context of a shared faith perspective, and takes its experiences to prayer. A focus on task forces and commissions as learning groups makes a valuable and useful contribution not only to making such groups more effective but also to helping such large systems as religious orders, provinces, and dioceses become renewed.

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# The Heart of Ministry

*Reverend Thomas J. Morgan, Ed.D.*

**I**t was a hot, humid, hazy July afternoon when I rang the doorbell. Mrs. X sheepishly opened the door and said, "I was expecting you. Please come in. You know, Father," she continued, "I don't go to church, but my neighbor told me it was in the bulletin last week that you would be visiting and blessing homes on our street this afternoon. I'm glad you're here. I'm a shy type of person and would never initiate contact with a priest.

"A lot has happened in my life in the last few years," she said. "I want to talk about it, but have never had the courage. I don't know where to begin. For years I lived with a man who stopped off at home long enough to shower and to change his clothes; a man who seemed preoccupied and running all the time; a man who had a single-minded devotion to climbing the corporate ladder; a man who had no intimacy with me or the children. He left me seven years ago. I asked him to leave because he was an alcoholic and very abusive. He continues to see the children with regularity, but I don't know if we will ever be reunited. I met another man and that relationship fell through. Now I've found someone with whom I spend the weekends. He lives in another state, and sometimes I go to his church. I feel comfortable there because no one knows me. I don't go to your church because I'm too ashamed and feel very guilty. I am so

confused about the church's teachings. Can I go to Sunday worship? Can I go to Holy Communion? Should I get a divorce and seek an annulment? Oh, I feel so much better now that I can talk to someone. I am glad to get this off my chest. I feel so relieved."

## YEARNING TO BE HEARD

She used the language of a hurting woman looking for meaning. She was looking for healing and community. She was looking for an impartial and empathic listener. She did not feel loved and valued. She did not feel called by God's Spirit. She was obsessed with what she had lost. She had no idea that she had spoken nonstop for more than half an hour—quite an achievement for a woman who had introduced herself as "shy."

I said to her, "You are going through a difficult time in your life; you are struggling with meaning and purpose; you don't know where to turn; you long to experience God."

"That's right," she said, "and sometimes I wonder if there is a God."

I did not give her advice or attempt to address her theological issues. The deeper issue was her need to be heard. My listening brought relief and hope. My ears did more than words could have; caring does



not always have to be expressed through action. One's presence alone can be the greatest gift. The famous German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who died a martyr under the Nazi regime, wrote of the importance of listening and the art of being in *Life Together: Theological Monographs*:

Many people are looking for an ear that will listen. They do not find it among Christians, because these Christians are talking where they should be listening. He who can no longer listen to his brother/sister will soon be no longer listening to God either; he will be doing nothing but prattling in the presence of God, too. This is the beginning of the death of the spiritual life, and in the end there is nothing left.

Karl Menninger, the well-known psychiatrist and founder of the Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kansas, asked a class of psychiatric residents to identify the most important part of the treatment process of mental patients. Some said it was the relationship between therapist and patient. Some said it was recommendations for the patient's future behavior. Some said it was the prescription of drugs. Some emphasized continuing contact with the patient's family after hospital treatment had ended. But Menninger did not accept any of those answers. For him, the first and most important task of any healer or therapist was to listen. After decades of work as a psychiatrist, Menninger believed that the experience of not being listened to made people unwell, and the experience of being listened to made them well again. The experience of being loved through listening made them whole again. The experience of stillness in the presence of another person gave them a sense of their God-given purpose in life.

Menninger's belief is supported by surveys and studies that have shown that the therapists who are most successful in bringing emotional and spiritual health back to their clients are those who are best able to listen with empathy, compassion, and a sense of reverence and respect for the sacredness of another human being. Whether a therapist's theoretical framework is cognitive, behavioral, Jungian, Freudian, Rogerian, or anything else, his or her effectiveness hinges on the ability to communicate care, respect, love, and compassion by listening with a nonjudgmental attitude. This explains in part why some priests, religious, and laypersons are great spiritual guides, whereas others are not. Listening to someone may not seem like much, but its effects are very healing. Everyone yearns to be heard.

## LISTENING ESSENTIAL TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH

To Mrs. X, my listening was the highest form of respect and reverence she could receive. It conveyed to

her that she was precious and special. I did not find it easy to give her my full attention. It took time and skill. It meant centering my attention on her thoughts and feelings, her ups and downs, her joys and pain, her pleasures and sorrows. But my listening helped her feel cared for and loved. It helped her reflect on her own thoughts about herself, her past life, others, and her God. Most of all, it helped her think in a more organized, rational, and appropriate manner.

The spiritual journey calls for a willingness to listen to self, others, and God. It is not an easy path. It is often the path of the cross, but it is the only path. It involves discipline, time, and the purification of one's personality. Listening promotes that journey inward which is so necessary for spiritual health. Listening helps us on the journey toward the still center of our being, where, according to the mystics, we find the presence of God. The deepest center of our being is the seat of our conflicts and our joys, but it is also the place of God's Spirit. The journey inward brings us the discovery of self and God.

It is almost impossible to reach out to others in ministry if we have not first reached inside ourselves, if we have not reached into our own growing-up experiences, if we have not reached into the movement of God in our lives. It is only by looking inside that we can find the skill and the will to go outside and minister to others. One of the great impacts and legacies of psychoanalyst Karen Horney was to tell us that constructive possibilities stem from one's essential nature, from the very core of one's being; the individual turns unconstructive or destructive only if he or she cannot discover himself or herself. Joy and happiness come from within, not from without. Ministry is born from within, not from without. Reaching out to another constructively in ministry depends on reaching into the source of light in your own soul, reaching into your own center at the core of your being. As the fourteenth-century *Book of the Poor in Spirit* expresses it, "he who truly desires to find God should enter into himself and seek God within."

## JESUS AS MODEL OF EMPATHIC LISTENER

The whole point and purpose of Jesus' life, from the crib to the cross, was to teach us how to live. He modeled how to reach into one's own center. At that center, God's indwelling grace enables us to relate well and faithfully first to ourselves, then to others in ministry. Jesus and the inner life go together. Jesus promises, "I am with you always." But in a sense, if we do not reach in, he is not there; if we are not listening, then he is not healing us and others in the context of ministry.



Jesus was not a trained helper, yet his earthly life was surrounded and shaped by his just being and listening. He was a healer of human spirits. He was not a trained priest or rabbi, but he was an empathic listener. He accomplished major changes in the lives of people because he listened to them with his full attention. He listened to the ten lepers and healed them; he listened to Jairus and healed his daughter; he listened to Martha and Mary and raised Lazarus. He listened to the woman who touched the hem of his cloak and healed her; he listened to Mary Magdalene and gave her hope; he listened to Peter, James, and John, and they became great fishers of human beings; he listened to Zacchaeus, and Zacchaeus came down from the tree; he listened to the plea of the blind beggar and restored his sight. Daily, Jesus is listening to all of us—every priest, religious, deacon, and layperson—in our fragile, broken, vulnerable conditions. Daily, he can heal us, if only we speak to him and open our hearts in gratitude. Daily, he can fill us with the gift and power to minister. But if we do not listen, he cannot fill us. This is beautifully illustrated in a Zen story:

The Master Nan-n had a visitor who came to inquire about Zen, but instead of listening, the visitor kept talking about his own ideas. After a while Nan-n served tea. He poured tea into his visitor's cup until it was full. Then he kept pouring. Finally, the visitor could not restrain himself. "Don't you see it's full?" he said. "You cannot get any more in." "Just so," replied Nan-n, stopping at last. "And like this cup you are filled with your own ideas. How can you expect me to give you Zen unless you offer an empty cup?"

Listening is the greatest skill we can bring to ministry. A good listener cares enough to let the other person talk. Often that is all people really need. To allow another person to speak words of hurt and brokenness is the highest form of ministry. Listening becomes an act of affirmation, healing, caring, and loving. The listener thus becomes a model of goodness, joy, and happiness. The listener truly becomes a messenger of good news.

Listening is the heart of ministry.

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# Experiencing God in Brokenness

*Margaret M. Riordan, R.S.M., M.B.A.*

**T**hroughout my life as a woman religious, I had always been in the position of being a caregiver for others. Then God began to break into my life in varied and dramatic ways, and I learned what it was like to be on the receiving end of God's mercy. This article summarizes how that process took place. I hope it will help other caregivers, as well as care receivers, to have greater understanding as they deal with the pain of human growth and development.

To introduce my story, I present the following images and symbols:

- A log in a fireplace breaks open and bursts into flame, spreading its heat and light around it.
- A day of prayer: the community, assembled in silent prayer, is a flaming fire. I am a log, engulfed by the flames and also part of the fire; I feel its heat and light.
- Moses taking off his shoes before the burning bush and hearing the message, "Go and do as I tell you, for I will help you speak well and tell you what to say" (Exod. 4:12).

Trembling like Moses, a living witness of God's mercy, I take off my shoes as I stand before the flames of my assembled community. I invite you also to take off your shoes, literally or figuratively, for

truly the ground we stand on together is holy. The ground of our being is holy.

As I share my story with you, I invite you to listen with your heart. As you enter my experience, let it speak to your own, for I am convinced that it is through our experience that God speaks to us and we inform one another.

I have struggled to bring this story to birth, and my whole being has resisted, because the truth of brokenness is very messy and full of anger, hurt, grief, and pain.

## **FEELING ABANDONED BY GOD**

Like most people, I've experienced episodes of brokenness throughout my life, but I am going to pick up my story seven and a half years ago, when I relocated to the New York City area after twenty-one years in upstate New York. That move was painful; it separated me from most of my longtime friends and from a lifestyle and area that had nurtured me. I felt lost, lonely, and vulnerable. The image of God that had served me so well up to that time was also broken during these changes. I felt abandoned by the very One for whom I had poured out my life all those years.

As I was tossed around in the turbulent waters of life over the next few years, I seemed to become

enmeshed in a downward spiral of negative and painful experiences. A serious car accident, life-threatening family illnesses, and the suicide of my nephew's wife added stress to my life as I adjusted to a new area, began a new ministry, and became part of a new local community.

It was in the context of these cumulative stresses and experiences that I faced my first bout with cancer.

It all began quite simply, with a routine physical examination and mammography. It ended with a mastectomy. On the day I lost a breast, I almost lost my father, who was hospitalized after falling into the bathtub and hitting his head.

Convalescence began. As I regained the use of my affected arm, I proudly displayed the masking tape wall markers that indicated my arm's slow but steady progress in reaching higher. Then came the time to be fitted for a prosthesis. I was exposed again to strangers' eyes and all the feelings that evoked, and I was grateful for the presence of a friend.

I cried a lot, sometimes without any apparent reason. I was embarrassed when this happened in front of others, as it too often did. Gradually, my strength and energy returned, and I began to feel whole again. I had grieved the loss of a breast in the midst of much support—cards, letters, phone calls, visits, and prayers from community members, family, and friends. My wounds, physical and emotional, began to heal. Both the surgeon and I breathed a sigh of relief as he pronounced me cured.

## RESTORED HOPE DASHED

One year later I returned to the doctor, free of fear and full of confidence. I was so confident that I even forgot to ask the doctor about the mammography results—until he handed me the report, with tears in his eyes. I remember feeling very cold. I felt as if I had just been kicked in the stomach, but I was numb to the pain. Surgery was scheduled without delay.

The night before my second mastectomy was to be performed, the surgeon called to say it might have to be postponed because the preoperative chest x-ray indicated a problem. A bone scan would have to be done as soon as possible. I didn't fully comprehend the implications of what he was saying until I met him early the next morning at the hospital.

When the surgeon explained that the x-ray showed that the cancer had apparently spread to my lungs and ribs, I realized what he had been trying to tell me earlier: it might be too late for surgery. In that moment, I felt as if everything around me and within me fell away. I was driven to a depth of myself where I had never been before. There I heard God speak with unforgettable clarity. I had prayed so many times to

see God's face, but being confronted with my death was not how I had envisioned my prayers being answered. As I endured the wait for the isotope lab to open in order to determine if my bone scan could be done that day, a sister sat beside me, honoring my silence with her silent, compassionate presence and gently responding when I spoke.

Finally, after being shuttled through a maze of tests, scans, and other procedures, I had another mastectomy. Convalescence and grieving began again. This time, however, a significant number of lymph nodes were found to be malignant, and I braced myself for the impending blow of chemotherapy. I began to lose a sense of harmony within myself as I walled in my feelings and acted as if my body were some foreign object.

Terror gripped my soul during my first visit to the oncologist, and I cried all the way home. I had been warned not to let anyone put a needle in a mastectomy arm. What does one do when both arms have been traumatized by breast-cancer surgery, and one is faced with having several chemicals injected into one's arm on a biweekly basis for a year? "Choose life" became the focus of my prayer, but how does one do this when all one's life choices seem deadly? A new level of trust was called for.

## AGONY OF BROKENNESS

On that Good Friday, the Paschal Mystery took on a whole new meaning when my hair began to fall out—an outer sign of the inner reality. I had been forewarned about the side effects of the drugs, but knowing and experiencing are not the same. I felt dirty, ashamed, and embarrassed, and I wanted to hide. Now everyone would know that I was broken. The first time I appeared in public wearing my wig was at a community assembly—agony for a private person with a strongly introverted nature.

It seemed as if that year would never end. The chemotherapy numbed my fingers and toes and made me ill, and I got tired of being sick and tired. The sisters I lived with took turns accompanying me to each treatment session. Although they never once complained about doing so, I still felt within myself a resistance to this kind of dependence.

At the end of a year of chemotherapy, I began daily radiation treatments, and I was grateful to be able to drive myself to and from the hospital. Radiation was yet another assault on my body and mind. A sister who had already experienced radiation therapy aptly described it as being "exposed, tattooed, and treated like a slab of meat." By far, the pain in the depths of my soul was much more difficult to bear than the physical burning. Winter set in within my heart,



although it was springtime. When everyone else moved on to the resurrection, I was left feeling like an empty tomb. The image of Jesus stripped of his garments became prominent in my prayer, and I spent a lot of time in Gethsemane and at Golgotha.

Like a lump of clay on a potter's wheel, I went down and down, around and up, sometimes balanced but usually not. I desperately tried to cover up my inner turmoil and to regain control, but I no longer had the physical strength or psychic energy to do so. What had been familiar and natural ways of acting and coping no longer worked for me, and I no longer knew who I was.

## DROWNING IN FEELINGS

All kinds of emotions surfaced—frustration, anger, fear, guilt, shame. I didn't know who to be angry at, so I directed my anger at God, myself, and others. That caused even more confusion, guilt, and shame.

I was surrounded by an ocean of mercy, but I was drowning. The sisters I lived with asked how they could help, but I didn't know how to voice my needs to them. Because of this, I was sometimes left alone when I needed someone to be with me—not to say anything, just to be there. Many, many times they understood and held me as I cried on their shoulders. And I cried alone, often in the middle of the night. At dawn I would go to work and try to pretend that all was well. I felt like a hypocrite when others admired my strength and courage. The presence of visitors in our community meant that my options were to isolate myself in my room or to expose my brokenness over and over again in the name of hospitality.

The smallest things would catch me by surprise and throw me off balance, and I felt as if every nerve in my body was hypersensitized. Any lingering ache or pain could cause panic. Sometimes, when people greeted me, they looked at my chest before looking at my face. I'd try to lift my spirits with a walk in the park, but the sight of a jogger's breasts assaulted me anew. Rightly or wrongly, I was even pained by a symbolic image of women on the cover of a prayer booklet, which coincidentally arrived on the anniversary of my second surgery.

## ACCEPTANCE OF GOD'S MERCY

But God's mercy prevailed. Through that mercy I have become more understanding, compassionate, and loving than I was before my cancer-related experiences. As physical health began to return to my body, spiritual healing began to occur in my soul.

The significance of these events in my life forced me to search for their deeper meaning and led me to

reflect on my experience in the light of God's presence and mercy. This reflection seemed to act as a catalyst to reveal God's merciful love to me, which began to transform me through unfolding knowledge and understanding. I became more and more aware that I was undergoing changes not only on a physical, psychological, and emotional level but also on a deeper and more significant plane.

My forced dependence on others' goodness and kindness not only had the effect of demonstrating God's mercy working through then; it also eroded some of the layers of my self-sufficiency and enabled God to work directly on my soul. My very neediness called forth the mercy of God, and I began to respond to it. As openness and acceptance replaced resistance, growth took place.

Reflection on my experience of pain and suffering gradually and almost imperceptibly began to open me to a new understanding of Jesus' passion and of others' pain. I began to discover on a level deep within myself that all pain, like all life, is one. That insight led me to identify with all of suffering humanity as I never had before. Even though individuals' circumstances differ, sometimes radically, our pain is the same. The mystery of the Mystical Body of Christ took on new meaning.

With my new awareness of suffering, I found it almost impossible to watch a television news broadcast about needy, starving, or exploited people one minute and insensitive ads for mundane human luxuries the next. Any evidence of violence assaulted my sensibilities anew, in a deeper and more significant way, because now my understanding arose out of heartfelt experience rather than intellectual knowledge.

Finally, as integration gradually replaced fragmentation, I found myself empowered to reach out to others in a more compassionate and loving manner. In addition, I became more grateful for life and health; I now receive each day as a gift rather than taking it for granted. And each day I stand with God and all of broken humanity before the altar of life, praying: "This is my body, broken. This is my blood, poured out for you. Take these gifts and make them holy. Remember me."



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# Keeping Vigil at the Edge of Eternity

*Patrick J. McDonald, M.S.W.*

**T**o enter into a long night vigil with a friend breathing his or her last breaths is to travel to the edge of eternity. Not long ago, I journeyed to that borderline twice within a single month. I found these rare life experiences to be emotional, exhausting, provocative, intense, tearful, empty, absurd, difficult, time-warping, and even ineffable. But I have decided to write about them anyway, in an attempt to describe that which is not easily expressed.

## SEPARATE LIVES WITH COMMON THREADS

Besides their long night's journey into death, what did these two friends of mine have in common? Clearly, both were born, lived life fully, suffered, and died; both lived out to their last breath what they believed was their special calling from God. Their deep convictions bonded them together in hidden solidarity, even though they only indirectly knew of each other during their latter years. They never talked to one another, consulted with each other, or enjoyed the opportunity to jointly weigh their deep wisdom. They did pray for each other after they were informed of one another's illnesses.

To a casual observer, their lifestyles had little in common. Maurice, a retired Catholic bishop, was 78

when he died. He left behind a legacy of gentle pastoral concern and social activism. Helen, a farm wife, lived and breathed for 82 full years. She left to her 11 children, 39 grandchildren, and 33 great-grandchildren a legacy of quiet strength, deep faith, and nurturing love.

For nineteen years, Bishop Maurice Dingman's life was identified with the destiny and mission of a diocese in the midwestern United States. His life of love excluded no one, poor or wealthy, famed or unknown, believer or unbeliever. Two years after his death, I continue to converse with people from every part of the country who remember the man and his tireless pastoral work.

Helen's life was more hidden. She lived quietly, beginning her married life in rural South Dakota around the time when the Great Depression descended like a dust storm over the vast, undulating prairie. She became a hardworking farm wife, good mother, and generous neighbor. When others abandoned the ravaged land in despair and moved on, she stubbornly stayed put like a glacial boulder and continued praying and providing for the needs of her family. She asked little in return. In contrast to Maurice, who was widely known, Helen was known primarily within a circle of family, friends, and residents of her small community.



The stories of these two individuals' lives unfolded in simplicity and holiness, experience by experience, day after day, over a long stretch of history, while they worked out the terms of their beliefs about what God expected of them.

The last years of their lives had been trying, inviting each of them to reach deeply into a reservoir of honest and hard-won resourcefulness. They spoke clearly about the tension they felt as they wrestled with what it meant to enter into the mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Maurice always included reflections on "living the Paschal Mystery" as a consistent focus for his pastoral leadership. Helen was more inward, reflecting quietly on what it meant for her to "carry her cross" during hard times.

When Maurice was flattened by a massive stroke at age 72, he was challenged to the depths of his beliefs about the full implications of the Paschal Mystery. Some days made more sense to him than others.

Helen suffered from a series of chronic illnesses in her later years, among them coronary problems that finally took her life. She too found a hard challenge in living out the call of the Paschal Mystery as she came to identify it in her life. She also found prayer and confidence in God to be her greatest consolation.

The years leading up to their deaths were marked by visits from loyal friends and family, who witnessed their transitions from living active lives to confronting the transient nature of everything human. Like two vectors converging from opposite directions, both lives culminated in final hours that were almost identical in their development and conclusion. At the center of this convergence was an encounter with the living God, now fully possessed by these individuals but still mysterious to those who kept the night vigil.

## THEMES EMERGE AROUND DYING

It became apparent to me that several themes were played out that touched each of us present at the night vigil, as the passage from life to death unfolded. Faith informed us that behind it all was a loving God who brought the dying person's years to fullness. Each person, however, interprets the events of the final hours of a dying friend differently. I will attempt to describe what I experienced as a participant-observer, realizing that other vigil keepers may have had an entirely different view of what took place before us.

**Breath.** The most observable phenomenon I noticed as I entered the rooms of my two dying friends was their breathing—its rate, intensity, and depth. Breath is the first thing checked and the last thing listened for as the themes of living and dying work their way to a conclusion. Those keeping a night vigil listen

for every breath of the dying person on some level of consciousness. Meanwhile, the breath may be monitored precisely by a machine; several times each minute, a thin blue line representing pulmonary function is etched on a television monitor above the hospital bed. Thus, breath is viewed as a reliable indicator of whatever life is left, measured in seconds rather than years. Breathing is also the event most commented upon by the participants in a night vigil. As the seconds turn into minutes, which turn into hours of vigilant observation, nights and days blur in a clouded, surrealistic haze. Spontaneous reflections structure the shared group anxiety: "God breathes into us the breath of life at our birth." "We are breathed over in Baptism." "His breathing is labored." "She seems to be more comfortable now; the end might be near."

Anxiety ebbs and flows; powerful emotions wash like waves over those keeping vigil. Tears flow uncontrollably; some pray their last farewells, proclaiming that the end has come at last. Then the dying person's breathing hesitates, deepens, and integrates into a new and not yet comprehended rhythm.

Friends and family sigh, then return to their chairs to wait some more. Some depart for home, exhausted after several long nights of monitoring breathing and counting seconds. Silence settles over the room again, and the wait continues. The sounds of labored breathing continue to remind the vigil keepers of the intimate connection between breath and the Giver of Life.

**Touch.** The dying loved to be touched. We knew that both Maurice and Helen were wrestling with their fears about what awaited them after their breathing stopped. It was apparent that their bodies resisted every change in their passages as vital systems continued to break down. Touch, the universal language of concern, offered a bridge between our feeble efforts to speak and their lonely struggle to live or die.

Gathering around the hospital bed, we night visitors soothed, caressed, held, comforted, massaged, hugged, spoke openly of God's embrace of love, and generally did what human beings do best in uncertain moments: communicate through touch. The results were gratifying. These precious dying friends stopped tossing and turning. They calmed, they answered back with gentle touch of their own, and they bonded with us.

These gentle moments, right up to the final second of each life, reminded us that the dying have not yet entered into God's final care. The vigil participants are called upon to nurture and sustain the dying until their final surrender into God's eternal embrace.

**Prayer.** The last hours of life leave only prayer to bridge the gap between the terminally ill person and God. Accomplishments, structures, significant life works, and efforts to build a lasting Kingdom on earth all crumble in the face of inevitable change. Only the naked poverty of life, stripped of all artificiality, remains. Stark poverty opens the way to honest prayer, with its resonances as deep and vital as the dying person's breathing. Prayers from the depths of one's heart come easily. Prayerful honesty with the dying about their going home to God is deeply appreciated by them. Verbal gamesmanship and contrived prayer simply do not fit, and everyone knows it. To pray with the dying as they come closer to eternity offers them support and comfort. If a dying person has lapsed into a semiconscious state, the prayer of the vigilant community offers energy and articulation to that person, who labors with the expression of his or her spirit.

In the early morning of her second restless night of hospitalization, Helen was lying beneath a tangled mass of tubes, electrodes, and adhesive tape; her mouth was covered with an oxygen mask. Only the beeps of the electronic monitoring equipment punctuated the silence of her room in the intensive care unit. She tried to talk to us through her oxygen mask. After straining to understand her several garbled efforts to communicate, I finally realized that she was asking me to lead in praying the Rosary. I agreed. Unfortunately, however, I drew a blank when I tried to remember the sorrowful mysteries she had requested. After I confessed my lapse of memory, she came to my aid and offered each mystery at the proper time. Several times our exchange was so humorous that we all ended up laughing as Helen repeated the mysteries through her oxygen mask and I tried to make out what she was saying. She enjoyed the exchange, then settled in for a peaceful rest after we prayed and embraced each other again.

**Song.** Maurice loved music. Several songs were especially touching to him; "Holy Ground" was one of them. He often requested that my wife, Claudette, sing it for him. This legacy lasted from our first visit after his stroke until his last breath. He would listen, then become visibly soothed. Another meaningful song for him was "Salve Regina," which he had first come to know during boyhood holy hours at his local parish. It later became thematic for every major event of his life. We friends sang it to him while he breathed the last breath of his life, and it opened the way into eternal life for him.

**Surrender.** The surrender of all we possess and all we have achieved often develops in stages for the dying

person. Neither of my dying friends seemed to handle this easily. Each sought reassurance from us that all would be in order: that a Down Syndrome daughter would be cared for, that a peace ministry would continue, that family farms would be preserved, that all would be well for the people of God. Both needed reassurance that life was in order for us as well as for them before it became acceptable to surrender. In brief, they needed to know that we had given them permission to die.

The facial expression of each changed visibly when the moment of surrender came. Both appeared to be much more peaceful and accepting of what they now knew was inevitable. There was a diminishing of restlessness, a visible easing of anxiety. They knew, and we articulated to one another, that their final hour was almost upon them.

Helen fought for two nights before she began the surrendering process early one morning. She chose to be medicated and made comfortable, and she embraced the end of her life by being present to her family.

Maurice began his surrender process during his 78th birthday party, two weeks to the day before he died. He was in an unusually upbeat mood when someone asked him what he wished for his birthday. Without hesitation, he replied, "To go to heaven."

**Agenda.** The agenda for the dying person is clearly his or her own agenda. A patient and loving God calls us home only when we have finished our life's work. God awaits our final surrender only after our work is completed. Maurice stayed alive until a missing lifelong friend could visit him. This special friend had been away on business but made it back in time to say his farewell.

Helen waited to die until missing family members came from a distant city in order to say their good-byes. Delayed by a late airline flight, they were en route as we gathered around Helen's bed, continuing our night vigil into the afternoon hours of her last day. The screen of her heart monitor periodically showed a flat line, and our prayers intensified as the flat line extended. Those present felt that it was all over, that Helen's hour had come. Yet our perception that her departure was imminent reflected our agenda rather than hers. The flat line on the monitor continued for what seemed like a long time; then Helen visibly rallied as her heartbeat restabilized in a weak yet consistent mode. She remained in a stable situation for the next five hours, apparently waiting for the arrival of the delayed family members.

Two hours after they arrived and had time to say what needed to be said, she died; her agenda was completed.



**Silence.** When the time is right, when the work has been finished, when the surrender is in its final stages, the actual moment of death arrives.

In the predawn hours of Maurice's last day, I was sprawled on a sofa, getting some sleep after another night vigil. His hospital room and the adjacent hallways were occupied by sleeping friends and many family members. I suddenly awoke with a sense of his presence that I intuitively recognized as different. It was as if my unconscious mind had jostled me because of the dramatic shift in the rhythm of his breathing. I felt, however, that his spirit had alerted me to be awake and to watch, like Jesus, who announced to his friends that his hour had come. I was on my feet, moving silently across the room, when his breathing became severely labored. Two of us began to alert the others that the final moment was upon us.

We twelve exhausted and sleepy followers gathered around Maurice's bed and watched him take the last few breaths of his life, each one more labored. We sang, we cried, we prayed; we asked him to remember us in eternity; we embraced. We were scared; we stood on the edge of eternity and trembled. When his breathing stopped, the light in his eyes turned to a glaze. His days were done; he was in God's love.

Helen died surrounded by her family as well. She went more quickly, catching some family members by surprise as they took a brief break from their vigil. The monitors ceased measuring life, and all became very quiet.

## A LONG SILENCE

The first experience of those who are left behind is a profound, haunting sense of quiet. They stand on the edge of a great unknown void but are not allowed to peer over the edge or enter its realm. Faith informs this dark uncharted sea with knowledge, but on the experiential level it remains an encounter with silence.

For Maurice, we celebrated a simple, moving liturgy of liberation in his presence. His body was free at last of the six-year ordeal of suffering that had slowly drained him of every ounce of his vitality.

After Helen died, the nursing staff asked her family to vacate the hospital room for a period of time so they could "cleanse" it. This gave them the privacy to free her body of all tubes, tape, measuring devices, oxygen mask, and other life-support equipment. The monitors, with their relentless beeping, were finally

silenced and stored away for another drama. Every bit of clutter was cleared from tables, desks, and work areas.

When the family reentered the room it was as clean and purified as the souls of those who respectfully filed back in. All was quiet for a time. No miracles, extraordinary revelations, or astounding events took place in these last moments. Only faith gave a shadowed glimpse of what had happened. Whatever the existential reality had been for the deceased, it remained between them and the Creator. Our encounter was with prolonged silence.

To be that close to the experience of death was awesome in the true sense of the word: we were filled with awe and trembling. Gathered in Helen's clean, bare hospital room, none of the vigil participants dared to rupture the profound silence with any fumbling efforts to speak wisdom. Only Carol, Helen's 35-year-old Down Syndrome daughter, broke the stillness by voicing, innocently and spontaneously, the questions everyone else dreaded. She stood beside Helen's bed for the longest time with tears streaming down her cheeks, tenderly stroking her mother's face and white hair, asking plaintively, "Are you going to come back? Can I come home any more?" As family members embraced her, the only response to her questions was more tears.

After our liturgy for Maurice, we all remained very quiet and prayerful for a while. Some of us wept quietly. Others began offering reassurance that our friend was in heaven at last. My own way of dealing with the sadness was to get busy putting sofas back together and picking up water glasses, coffee cups, and silverware. I bumped into a fellow "doer" who was cleaning up another room, and we affectionately chided each other for channeling our anxiety into cleaning house.

Soon we were embracing one another and filing out, one by one, into the cool early morning air. By our silent departures, we acknowledged that although life was never going to be the same, there was still business to be done.



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# BOOK REVIEWS

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*Care of the Soul: A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life*, by Thomas Moore. New York, New York: Harper-Perennial, 1994. 312 pp. \$12.00.

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What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul?" (Matt. 16:26). This, according to the preachers of my youth, in the days long before "inclusive" language, was the ringing question of Ignatius Loyola to a fellow university student, Francis Xavier. Later on, a piety striving to be more incarnational began to frown on the word *soul*. The notion of soul had become too disembodied, too platonic, evocative of a pure entity chained to an earthly condition it longs to escape. But the retranslations were unfortunate: "What will a man gain if he wins the whole world and ruins his life" (*Bible of Jerusalem*), if he does so "at the cost of his true self" (*New English Bible*), if he "forfeits his life"? (*Revised Standard Version*). The *New American Bible's* rephrasing is the most ungainly: "What profit would a man show if he were to gain the whole world and destroy himself in the process?"

One result of dispensing with the word *soul* was to relegate some Christian classics to the shelf—for example, Saint Teresa of Avila's *Interior Castle*. The subject of that work is God's dwelling and action in the soul (*el alma*), that part of ourselves more interior even than the heart. In the Sixth Mansion, for example, "the soul has been wounded with love for the Spouse." "Oh my God," Teresa exclaims, "how great are the trials which the soul will suffer" before entering the Seventh (and final) Mansion. "Despite all this torment, the soul does not offend God, and would not do so for anything upon earth, yet . . . the soul seems not to feel the smallest spark of any love for God." How exactly she describes the desolation, or depression, felt by the young Carmelite saints Therese of Lisieux and Teresa of the Andes shortly before their deaths. A writer or lec-

turer today, discussing the graces and tribulations of those saints or of anyone striving to serve God, would, by the sharpest contrast to Teresa, keep "soul" out of it.

But soul language is back, thanks to the recent best-seller *Care of the Soul* by Jungian analyst Thomas Moore. Soul, for Moore, though an intuitive concept eluding definition, is something far other than a neoplatonic essence to be saved from the husk of the physical. For him, soul is gritty, attentive to household details and daily business, passionate, even epicurean (Epicurus having suffered a bad rap). Whereas the soul according to Teresa needs to be absorbed with God, Moore focuses on the humanizing process, the soul's engagement with the things of this world. He is a student and an exponent of the archetypal psychologist James Hillman, whom he quotes thus: "The way through the world is more difficult to find than the way beyond it."

That said, soul for Moore has principally to do with interiority, depth. This recalls Teresa: "Happiness arises somewhere more interior than the heart, somewhere of which the springs are very deep. It must be the center of the soul. I certainly find secret things in ourselves which often amaze me" (Fourth Mansion). They amaze Moore too, as they arise in dreams or surface in our imaginations, shadowy or clear.

Moore as much as asks, You want to see how the imagination helps us to be soulful? Take the image of water, so prominent in baptism. Water suggests life's currents, the river of existence, human fluidity too—and, of course, the wellsprings of our being. So also Teresa: "There are certain spiritual things which I can find no way of explaining more aptly than by this element of water. As this heavenly water [extraordinary grace] begins to flow from this source of which I am speaking—that is, from our very depths—it proceeds to spread within us . . . so that the soul itself cannot understand all that it receives there" (Fourth Mansion). Moore and Teresa are not exactly speaking the same language—she explains the way of perfection, he a way through imperfection—yet there is a linkage.



Moore writes that “all human symptoms and problems, when taken to their depth . . . find their ultimate solution in a religious sensibility.” He distinguishes spirituality from soul. Our spirituality—our consciousness of the Absolute, our reading of the sacred books, our attraction to holiness, our assertion of the highest values—carries serious risks, he says: “It’s easy to go crazy in the life of the spirit.” (Teresa, who kept urging the spiritual aspirant above all to seek a sensible confessor, was saying much the same.) Spirituality very much needs soul, according to Moore—intelligence, sensitivity to the symbolic and metaphoric, an impulse of attachment, an exploratory zest. It needs body, individuality, a sense of family and history. These do not consort well with a fundamentalist strictness and uniformity.

Thomas Moore confesses that he is strongly Jungian. He is convinced that mythology, or hero stories (tribal or individual), provide us with most of our guiding insight. *The Odyssey*, for instance, that “long, dangerous, adventure-filled story,” is about the soul training to be fatherly. Moore presents Demeter as his mother figure, the one who has to track her daughter through the Underworld—“the invisible, mysterious, unfathomable depths of a person or a society”—so as to guide her toward life and community.

Moore holds to a working principle that might be balked at by someone trying to walk the way of the pilgrim or to practice the imitation of Christ: “It is in the nature of things to be drawn to the very experiences that will spoil our innocence, transform our lives, and give us necessary complexity and depth.” He seems to agree with the serpent that Eve had best eat the apple because it will be a broadening experience. But mostly, as an interpreter of human phenomena, he is pointing out the problem of the *puer*—the young man, such as Hippolytus or Tristan, who is bent on pure heroics, confident of his powers and goodness, harsh in his judgments and behavior. The *puer* has a lot to learn about the world’s intransigence and his own frailty. It is the frailty, the vulnerability, the gaps and failures—in Jungian terms, the reality of the child—that will allow a passage to maturity, but only after some form of death. There is a lot of death in Moore’s notion of the soulful life.

Moore’s approach is not so much therapeutic as it is homeopathic. For instance, he suggests that instead of going on the attack, struggling to extirpate a destructive habit or end an agonizing condition—narcissism, depression, illness, jealousy, envy—you should try to find out what the painful state is telling you. Honor the symptom and let it guide you in the care of the soul. Take narcissism: the fixation upon oneself, joined with the incapacity for love or for at-

tention to others, can lead to “a deeper version of oneself . . . a true stillness, a wonder about oneself, a meditation on one’s nature.” Depression also, “a matter of the soul’s aging,” a condition that can take all the bounce out of one’s life and cloud over one’s bright convictions, can lead to insight into mortality and “interest in eternal issues.”

None of this personal expansion happens without interior effort, or what Moore refers to as “soul work.” Soul work is what the therapist exists to foster; it is the unromanticized response to life. With soul work, says Moore, we can be at home with power, which may otherwise be explosive:

It is foolish to deny signs of the soul’s power—individuality, eccentricity, self-expression, passion—because it cannot be truly repressed. . . . Mars, when he is honored, gives a deep red hue to everything we do, quickening our lives with intensity, passion, forcefulness, and courage. When he is neglected we suffer the onslaughts of uncontained violence.

With soul work, too, we can face and even enjoy “the unavoidable tendency of the soul to get itself into love trouble.” Soul, which “yearns for attachment, for variety in personality, for intimacy and particularity,” also “apparently needs amorous sadness.” He concludes his excellent chapter on love with this reflection: “There is no way toward divine love except through the discovery of human intimacy and community. One feeds the other.”

*Care of the Soul* was written by a longtime practitioner of what Plato called *techné tou biou*, the craft of life. It puts order into his reflections—which, among other things, indicate that Moore would have us care intently also for the soul of the inanimate world—that is, of things.

Moore does not speak much of God, though he does briefly narrate his own religious itinerary. But he is one of those rare psychologists a religious person could feel at ease consulting, because he patently appreciates the earnestness of the religious about faith and the love of God. In fact he considers it part of the psychologist’s job description to do so. *Care of the Soul* is no *Interior Castle*, yet Moore is a man full of the eminent good sense that Teresa, she of the “flaming heart,” would want in her confessor.

One day, after Moore had left the seminary for what he describes as a “new secularism,” a tough-minded scientist told him, “You are always going to do the work of a priest.” This book is a strange kind of sermon. It does not do the work of the New Testament. Yet the author ministers to us generously; the apostolic impulse shows. After all, Thomas Moore may have brought back into currency the good old word *soul*.

—James S. Torrens, S.J.

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*Hearts on Fire: Praying with Jesuits*, collected and edited by Michael Harter, S.J., St. Louis, Missouri: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1993. 100 pp. \$3.95.

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**T**his up-to-date prayer book, organized around the themes of the weeks of Ignatius Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, can serve as a handy aid for periods of personal prayer and reflection, whether or not one is familiar with Ignatius's legacy of prayer. Almost every one of the more than a hundred short entries comes from the pen of one of forty Jesuits who have lived between the sixteenth century and the present. Authors include Ignatius, Peter Faber, Claude LaColumbiere, Alphonsus Rodriguez, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Joseph Tetlow, Antony deMello, Pedro Arrupe, Daniel Berrigan, Carlo Martini, and Michael Moynahan. The book contains a sprinkling of maxims, many prayers and some poems that fill whole or half pages, and a few reflection exercises of two or three pages. Concise and helpful background information is provided on most of the prayers. There is an interesting variety among the items with respect to length, style, sophistication, and content. Readers familiar with the manuals developed in recent years by Jesuits Joseph Veltri (*Orientations*) and Joseph Tetlow (*Choosing Christ in the World*) will appreciate the reprinting here of some of the best material those works have offered.

It is refreshing to find the harmonious blending of tried-and-true prayers of yesteryear and some very fine contemporary pieces, all carrying forward an Ignatian alertness to the presence of God in the various life experiences of active disciples. In a few cases, prayers from the past are given new renderings that stay faithful to the thrusts of the originals (e.g., Morning Offering, Anima Christi, Ignatius's Suscipe, and Francis Xavier's famous prayer). Many of the older prayers reproduced here are not available in contemporary sourcebooks.

The prayers, poems, and maxims in *Hearts on Fire* bear a traditional Ignatian emphasis on looking within and around oneself with a keen consciousness of the God found in significant experiences of self and world. Not surprisingly, they speak much about how fully we are loved by God and how our sin has weakened our response to God's love, about the Paschal Mystery, and about participating in the reality of Christ's resurrection. Some of the most recent compositions included in this collection are striking in their in-

corporation of such themes as justice, peace, and martyrdom.

These prayers will probably be used mostly by individuals praying alone, but they could also become the basis for group prayer in meetings, classes, or devotional exercises. An especially noteworthy inclusion is an updated version of the Novena of Grace, devised to be used in the eucharistic liturgy at the times of the general intercessions and in a post-communion thanksgiving. The book contains a useful index of the names of the Jesuits whose prayers and reflections are included. Unfortunately, it lacks a table of contents or an index of themes. For the many Christians who engage regularly in fruitful personal prayer yet confine themselves to using memorized or formula prayers, *Hearts on Fire* can be of considerable assistance by not only giving them genuine substance but also by leading them gently toward greater variety and deeper reflectivity. A special treat is in store for those who, having already steeped themselves in the *Exercises*, want to reconnect with their main themes; this book could well be used to revisit the four weeks prayerfully.

—Reverend George P. Evans

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*A Gospel of Shame: Children, Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church*, by Elinor Burkett and Frank Bruni. New York, New York: Penguin, 1993. 292 pp. \$22.50.

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**A**s a psychotherapist with a doctorate in human sexuality who runs a treatment program for sex offenders, I found this book compelling. In spite of its occasional stridency, it rings true as it presents information gleaned from interviews with victims, offenders, and treatment professionals describing predispositions and partial causes for abuse. In addition, the book offers suggestions for reducing the numbers of potential offenders among the clergy.

Burkett and Bruni have assembled a sobering array of case histories of victims of sexual abuse, the sad careers of their offenders, and the responses of chancery offices around the country. Their report, while more journalistic than scholarly in form, presents an amazing amount of information. Obviously supportive of the victims, the authors manage to delineate the significance of the problem and to suggest solutions without resorting to mere clergy-bashing.

Burkett and Bruni identify 1992 as the watershed year in the public's awareness of child abuse by



priests. That year the immense crimes of former priest James Porter were broadcast around the world: at least 125 boys and girls had been victimized by him in at least four states. As the authors sagely observe, "some abusers' pathology is so profound that there is just no way for them to construct a theological or intellectual defense for their behavior, so they sink into total denial of their problem, which only allows it to gather steam and force."

Unfortunately, it's not only the offenders who wrap themselves in denial. Even victims develop strong defenses against remembering such a violation of their trust and admiration. People in the pews often blame the victim rather than the offender. And chancery officials, not wanting to hear the sad news—or, more accurately, not knowing how to respond—sometimes listen more to their diocesan attorneys than to their own hearts.

The authors admit that there is no way to know how the number of priest pedophiles stacks up against that of the adult population at large, or against that of another professional class. But they assert cogently that "priest abusers have a unique and tragic opportunity to do damage. Their position of trust gives them special access to, and influence over, children and their families."

The interviews conducted for the book are extensive in scope. The authors have sought out key researchers and clinicians, including Nicholas Groth, Gene Abel, John Money, Eli Coleman, John Gonsiorek, and David Finkelhor. Burkett and Bruni summarize research findings and professional opinions in an interesting and readable fashion for the general public.

Until recently, future priests were recruited into the seminary in high school. Those who entered in college often came from Catholic schools, known for their ethos of discipline and control. What is it about the priesthood or about seminary training that disposes a man to molest children? Several suggestions are offered, including the following:

Tracked early for the priesthood—and celibacy—they stopped dating as teenagers, if they ever dated at all. Few went through the same paces of psychosexual development as other men. So later in life, if their unmet sexual needs compelled them to break their pledge of celibacy, they sought involvements with those they felt were their emotional peers. Those partners were teenagers.

One might expect this book to only sensationalize a complex problem. Obviously, the authors are presenting a work for popular readership, so their treatment of the many nuances of the issue reveals some simplification. Nevertheless, they avoid histrionics.

In fact, they display sensitivity not only to victims but to some abusers as well. And while they refer to the failure of some church leaders to intervene creatively, they admit that the bishops, lacking accurate information, were ill-equipped to handle the issue.

The time-honored damage-control method for the dioceses was to urge an offending priest to seek conversion and then give him a second chance. What the bishops didn't realize was that these men needed treatment in intensive therapeutic programs that could address the nature of compulsive/addictive behaviors as well as a host of character disorders. The early church-sponsored centers lacked the training and expertise to provide such comprehensive treatment.

One issue Burkett and Bruni highlight is the nature of the system of clerical privilege as it uniquely exists in the Catholic church. They see it as made to order for the exploitation of the less powerful:

The Church, as currently designed, simply does not have the flexibility to deal with a crisis that lingers at the intersection of sexuality, secrecy, patriarchy and blind obedience. Child sexual abuse has become a scandal within the Church not as a result of conscious, or even unconscious, error or evil, but because it is embedded in the very structure of Roman Catholicism.

That assessment seems both incisive and overblown. The problem is indeed systemic and resistant to simple solutions. But whether it is truly cancerous remains to be seen. Obviously, candidates for the priesthood must be screened more effectively. Sexuality (so long ignored and denied in many seminary formation programs) must indeed be explained and explored as an integral part of healthy human development. And a system for identifying potential problems must be put in place.

But the authors suggest even more radical surgery. They quote with favor from a report to the Canadian bishops by Paul McAuliffe, a social worker specializing in child abuse treatment programs:

It is true that misuse of power over those we consider less powerful is part of our human condition—the pyramidal pecking order. . . . This is all the more reason why we must structure ourselves as a church in a way that does not provide an environment which supports this human failing, as our present structure seems to do.

This book is both painful to read and cathartic. Working with both victims of sexual abuse and sex offenders, I know the intense pain inflicted on people through the misuse of power and sexuality. I well know the difficulties of assisting in real healing for both victim and victimizer. Yet there is hope that newer treat-



ments can bring healing, and I wish that the book dealt more with important recent developments.

Furthermore, the book fails to address the significance of family alcoholism as a predisposing factor for both offenders and their victims. Many priests come from families with a history of the disease. Not surprisingly, many also use alcohol to help themselves avoid the emotional impact of the stresses in their lives. This factor is often a part of their addictive acting-out through sexual abuse. Children from

alcoholic/dysfunctional families are especially needy and are thus prime targets for some powerful, seemingly God-like figure to take under wing and misuse.

Despite the authors' neglect of these topics, I welcome the book for its generally reasoned approach to a highly sensitive subject. It deserves serious consideration by church authorities and by all people interested in the health of religion.

—T. Nicholas Tormey, Ph.D.

## Memories of Abuse Not Always Reliable

In the past few years, an increasing number of cases of "recovered memories" have made their way into media headlines in connection with criminal charges and lawsuits over sexual abuse of children.

Recently, a panel of American Psychological Association (APA) members concluded that "repressed memories" of sexual abuse in childhood that are recalled years later should not all be accepted as accurate, but neither should they be automatically disregarded as mere fantasies. The panelists acknowledged that "it is possible for memories of abuse that have been forgotten for a long time to be remembered." However, they emphasized, it is "also possible to construct convincing pseudo-memories for events that never occurred."

The American Medical Association (AMA) has also gone on record as recommending caution regarding claims about "recovered memories." On the basis of clinical research, the AMA physicians reported, "It is not yet known how to distinguish true memories from imagined events in these cases," and the clinical use of such memories is "fraught with problems of potential misapplication."

The APA board of directors, when releasing the organization's report, offered timely professional advice about selecting psychotherapists: "The public should be wary of two kinds of therapists: those who offer instant childhood abuse diagnoses, and those who dismiss claims or reports of sexual abuse without exploration." A number of parents who complain that they have been wrongly accused of molesting their children (who first "remembered" the events as adults) are now suing therapists for inducing false memories through counseling techniques they charge are similar to brainwashing.

In a paper presented last month in Washington, D.C., to the assembled bishops of the United States, Johns Hopkins University psychiatrist Paul McHugh

compared recovered memories to the "flashbacks" described in the book *War Neuroses* by John MacCurdy, M.D. McHugh says that in MacCurdy's view, "the event depicted in the 'vision,' as he called flashbacks, was not a simple replication of an event, but the development from the experience of a 'worst fear' scenario. . . . Thus, it was not that the memory was jogged to replicate an experience in 'the mind's eye,' but rather that fear ran riot." McHugh explains that "flashbacks are not so much reproductions of events as they are 'worst fears' envisioned in settings where the patient could imagine even more traumatic consequences." Similarly, he notes that vivid recollections of sexual abuse, appearing in therapy, should not be presumed to be simply reproductions of the past; "they are more likely expressions of worst fears generated out of the focus of therapy—and may represent not post-traumatic states from an abuse but a post-traumatic state generated by the reawakening of childhood fears and fantasies."

Dr. McHugh says he believes that not all the recollections of abuse that therapists uncover are "pseudo-memories." Consequently, among his recommendations for treatment is his strong insistence that "the therapist must confirm the actual abuse before he or she launches into therapy." This can be done, he suggests, by turning the task over "to an open-minded consultant who can press through hospital and school records, reach external informants, and assess all the parties involved in the charges." He concludes that "to treat for repressed memories without any effort at external validation is malpractice pure and simple."

The False Memory Syndrome Foundation was founded in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, two years ago to assist persons claiming to be wrongly charged with abuse. Already, more than 7,000 phone calls have been received from people seeking the organization's assistance.



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